



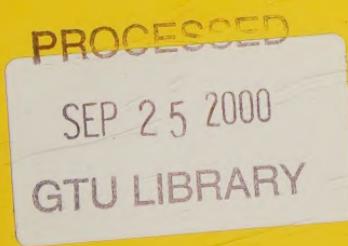
*jeevadhara*

**ECCLESIA IN ASIA  
A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE**

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**Edited by  
Sebastian Painadath**



# JEEVADHARA

is published every month  
alternately in English and Malayalam

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

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## *Ecclesia in Asia*

### A Theological Response

Edited by

**Sebastian Painadath**

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## CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	257
<i>Pleroma in the New Testament Its Significance for a Theology of Religions</i>	259
<i>Paddy Meagher</i>	
<i>Pūrṇam: An all Inclusive Concept in the Indian World-view</i>	271
<i>Stephen C. Thadom</i>	
<i>The Image of Jesus in <i>The Church in Asia</i></i>	281
<i>Michael Amaldoss</i>	
<i>Church and Mission in Asia in the Light of <i>Ecclesia in Asia</i>: a Critical Study</i>	290
<i>Jacob Kavunkal</i>	
<i>Interreligious Dialogue in <i>Ecclesia in Asia</i></i>	300
<i>Edmund Chia</i>	
<i>The Continental Bishops' Synods - Lost Chance or New Beginning?</i>	313
<i>Georg Evers</i>	
<i>Nine Sūtra on the "Asian Christ"</i>	330
<i>Raimon Panikkar</i>	

## Editorial

The Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops took place from 18 April to 14 May 1998 in the Vatican. In their speeches and other interventions the Asian bishops boldly articulated the existential concerns of the Asian people. They made it clear that Christian life, worship and theology in Asia must resonate with the pluricultural and multireligious fabric of Asia. They asked for a greater autonomy for the Asian local Churches so that truly *Asian Churches* evolve, and not just a *Church in Asia*. Does *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA), the final document of the Synod, truly respond to this quest of the Asian Churches for an effective Christian presence on this continent? This is the question taken up in this issue of *Jeevadharma*.

The basic question is Christological. EA acknowledges that 'the Synod Fathers noted that proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour can present particular difficulties in their cultures given that many Asian religions teach divine self-manifestations as mediating salvation' (10). Yet the Apostolic Exhortation harps on the classical formula: "Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer, the one universal Mediator, the fullness of revelation, the fulfilment of all religious quest" (2,6,13,14,18,20).

Michael Amaldoss examines critically the metaphysical framework that gives rise to such *a priori* Christological assumptions, and demands a more pneumatological perspective. Edmund Chia analyses the theological language of the document and shows how defensive doctrinal concerns bypass the real pastoral needs and existential questions. Jacob Kavunkal finds that EA may not have lasting transforming effect on Asian Churches for it leaves out of focus the liberative concerns of Jesus.

A term that frequently appears in EA is *fullness* (13,14,16,18,20). Paddy Meagher examines the meaning of *pleroma* in the New Testament: the first Christian community experienced in Jesus the *fullness* of God's self-gift, not in the sense that any other mode of God's self-revelation is to be excluded, but respected within the horizon of eschatological *pleroma*. Through an analysis of the term *poornam* in the Indian Scriptures Stephen C. Thadom shows that for Asians *fullness* connotes a transcendental all-comprehending experience of reality; anything at the phenomenal-historical level can only be a fragmentary perception of the *poornam*.

Raimon Panikkar proposes nine *Sutras* which point to the Christ-mystery in and through Jesus. Georg Evers examines critically the history, the dynamics and the effects of the continental Assemblies of the Bishops' Synod. All these contributions reveal a tension found in the post-Synodal Exhortation, a tension between an Asian perception and a Roman assertion: EA perceives that 'Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence' (6). At the same time EA demands: "Christians bring to interreligious dialogue the firm belief that the fullness of salvation comes from Christ alone and that the church community to which they belong is the ordinary means of salvation" (31). With the attitude contained in this demand, we Christians cannot genuinely respect the Scriptures and symbols of other religions and promote a culture of dialogue in Asia.

During his visits to various countries Pope John Paul II sets an impressive example of being a *pilgrim* with a genuine respect for other religions. While addressing Hindus (Madras, 1986) or Buddhists (Colombo, 1994) Muslims (Egypt, 2000) or Jews (Jerusalem, 2000) he uses a language that really vibrates with the basic quest of all religions. People of other religions feel that they are understood and respected.

Nowhere in these dialogue meetings did the Pope *proclaim* Jesus Christ as the sole Redeemer or as the fulfilment of the yearnings of the other religions. With a genuine openness to the 'Spirit who blows where it wills' Pope John Paul II discerns in the history of religions 'the age-long dialogue which God maintains with humanity' (Rome, 13, Nov. 1992). The goal of interreligious dialogue is then to listen to God's Word vibrating in and through other religions. "By dialogue, we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we open ourselves to God" (Madras, 1986). Hence with believers of other religions we are *copilgrims* (Assisi II, 1994).

Such a vision of Christian presence in a pluralistic milieu would resonate with the religious sentiments of Asians. But this is not the vision that EA presents. In Asia we live and work with believers of other religions. Our neighbours, friends and teachers are mostly people belonging to other religions. We share our joys and sufferings, blessings and tragedies with the sisters and brothers of other communities. In Asia we are in a permanent Assisi-situation. We need not invite representatives of other religions to us; they are always with us, for we live and breathe in their midst.

Sameeksha  
Kalady

Sebastian Painadath

## **Pleroma in the New Testament Its Significance for a Theology of Religions**

**Paddy Meagher**

One of the pivotal terms used in EA is *fullness/fulfilment*. Paddy Meagher examines the use of the term *pleroma* in the books of the New Testament and comes to the following conclusions: (i) *Pleroma* in all its forms and expressions belongs exclusively to God who shares this with creation; (ii) The NT community gives witness to its experience of this divine self-sharing in the person and event of Jesus the Christ: in this sense Jesus is the *pleroma* of God's revelation; (iii) but we need to distinguish - not separate - the Word-with-God from the Word-made-flesh; (iv) hence our faith in Christ does not exclude other divine manifestations, but invites us to respect the richness of the historical ways humanity does experience the Word in the diversity of religions. EA appears to be a *western* document with claims of exclusiveness; it has to be reinterpreted on the *Asian* soil where an inclusive approach is at home. Paddy Meagher is Professor of the New Testament at the Vidyajyoti College of Theology, 23 Rajnivas Marg, Delhi 110054.

The synodal document *Ecclesia in Asia* makes a number of references to the idea of fullness related to Jesus Christ. We quote some of the texts from Chapter II, *Jesus, the Saviour: A Gift to Asia*. In the section on *The Person and Mission of the Son of God* in the context of the communion of life and action of the Trinity we read

"He who has seen me has seen the Father", Jesus claims (Jn 14:9). In Jesus Christ alone dwells the fullness of God in bodily form (cf. Col 2:9), establishing him as the unique and absolute saving Word of God (cf. Heb 1: 1-4). As the Father's definitive Word Jesus makes God and his saving will known in the fullest way possible. "No one comes to the Father but by me", Jesus says (Jn 14:6). He is "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6), because as he himself says, "the Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn 14:10). Only in the person of Jesus does God's word of salvation appear in all its fullness, ushering in the final age (cf. Heb 1: 1-2). Thus, in the first days of the

Church, Peter could proclaim: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Lk 23:43) the document states that "thus he handed over to the Father the whole of creation and all humanity to be accepted finally by him in compassionate love." It continues, "Through Jesus' Paschal Sacrifice the Father irrevocably offers reconciliation and fullness of life to the world. This extraordinary gift could only come through the beloved Son, who alone was capable of fully responding to the Father's love, rejected by sin."<sup>2</sup>

Under the section *Jesus Christ: the Truth of Humanity* the document reflects on the way the incarnation sheds light on the human condition. "The Incarnate Son of God not only revealed completely the Father and his plan of salvation; he also fully reveals man to himself". It continues, "Through Jesus, man can finally know the truth of himself. Jesus' perfectly human life devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the vocation of every human being is to receive love and give love in return. Commenting on the resurrection it states, "At that moment, Jesus became once and for all both the revelation and the accomplishment of a humanity recreated and renewed according to the plan of God. In Jesus we discover the greatness and dignity of each person in the heart of God who created man in his own image (cf. Gen 1:26), and we find the origin of the new creation which we have become through his grace."<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting on the way Jesus created a new communion among all peoples Jesus is pictured in all he said and did as "the Father's voice, hands and arms, gathering all God's children into one family of love". It continues:

1 *Church in Asia*. Ecclesia in Asia published by Prayer Ministry Office, Xavier Hall, Jalan Gasing 46000, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia (p.33-34). The text used is that reproduced for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Malaysia-Singapore-Brunel, November 1999. I do not wish to comment on the manner in which Scriptural texts are used without any reference to the process by which the words and orientations of Jesus have been interpreted and re-expressed by the writers of John and Hebrews and other New Testament writers. The impression given in this document as in many others is that some of the words from the Gospels are the words of the historical Jesus of Nazareth.

2 *Ibid.* pp.34-35.

3. *ibid.* pp.35-36. Italics mine

Sent by the God of communion and being truly God and truly man, Jesus established communion between heaven and earth in his very person. It is our faith that "in him *all the fullness* of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (Col. 1: 19-20). Salvation can be found in the person of the Son of God made man and the mission entrusted to him *alone* as the Son, a mission of service and love for the life of *all*. Together with the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia proclaims the truth of faith: "There is one God, and there is *one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for *all* (I Tim 2:5-6).<sup>4</sup>

The final section in this chapter is *The Uniqueness and Universality of Salvation in Jesus*. Again the theme of fullness is sharply underlined. Having commented on the universal presence of the pre-existent Word in the cosmos, history and in every human yearning for good the document states:

....As the incarnate Word who lived, died and rose from the dead, Jesus Christ is now proclaimed as the *fulfilment of all creation, of all history, and of all human yearning for the fullness of life*.... In him, "authentic values of *all* religious and cultural traditions, such as mercy and submission to the will of God, compassion and rectitude, non-violence and righteousness, filial piety and harmony with creation find their *fullness and realization*." From the *first moment* of time to its *end*, Jesus is the *one universal* Mediator. Even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as the Saviour, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

We wish to study this manner of interpreting Jesus of Nazareth, Christ, Son and Lord in the New Testament. The specific term used not very frequently is *Pleroma*.

4 *Ibid.* pp. 37-38 Italics mine

5 *Ibid.* pp. 38-39. Italics mine. In the texts I have reluctantly left the exclusive language which I find unacceptable. I shall not comment on the constant repetition in various way of "uniqueness" except to remark that at no point is an attempt made to explain what is meant. The constant repetition of an idea, using biblical categories or other documents does not elucidate an aspect of faith so that it become intelligible to believers and prevents the danger of misunderstandings which would be offence to God's plan of salvation.

## Monotheism

All of the New Testament writers interpret Jesus in the only way, which was possible, namely, within the much broader and more complex story of God's action within history with specific reference to Israel as told by "Israel". Jesus also understood himself within this same great and rich religious framework. Like the First Testament, the Second Testament narrates the story of God specified in the narrative of Jesus and the Spirit. There is a danger of introducing the unknown, undivided and incomprehensible inner life of the Trinity into the narrative description of the Bible. But the distinctiveness of the roles of God, the Father, Jesus and the Spirit must be preserved. This is not the case at times in *Ecclesia in Asia*. This means to respect the prepositions used. All comes *from* God, the Father and returns *to* the Father. The Father acts *in and through* Jesus Christ and the Spirit. When ever any "saving" terms are used of Jesus Christ they are used with the implied "subordination" of Jesus to the Father who is and always remains the origin and originator and the actual final agent of all "saving" action and their effects.

Fullness in all its forms and expressions belongs exclusively to God who shares this with his creation. We wish to underline this point. The whole of biblical faith focuses on the origin of all and the goal of all. God, creator of the universe and of all peoples, God, the redeemer and creator of Israel as the servant people is the beginning and end of all.

The Bible is a complex narrative of the story of God acting in human history and in Israel's history. These two histories and all the actions of God overlap. Israel tells the story and so takes centre stage. We turn to the Jesus story.

## The First Testament, a rich Treasury for Interpretation

We shall begin with some reflections on two writings to which less attention is given, *Hebrews* and *Revelation*. A great institution through which God's action was mediated to the Jewish people was the Temple with its Holy of Holies, with its sacrificial system, key ritual and feasts and priesthood. The writer of *Hebrews* mines this rich heritage with special emphasis on the key priestly figure and the feast of the Day of Atonement, which had assumed great importance. He allows the stream of Covenant thinking and the expectation of a New Covenant to

flow into this stream. He also teases the meaning of the enigmatic figure of Melchizedek and the strange story of Abraham's relationship with him. These rich threads of the historical experience of God within Jewish religion and its emergence into Judaism enable the writer to describe the ultimacy of Jesus' role.

Allowing these religious riches and their deep connotations to resonate in his description, the writer underlines Jesus' death and resurrection as a "once for all" event, by which he enters into the very presence of God the Father to take his place at the right hand of God, with the gift of himself and in obedience to his Father in order to become the everlasting mediator. The narrative of Jesus is told in the light of these narratives and in contrast to them - temporary - permanent; die - live; often - once for all; exterior - interior; earth - heaven; mortal - immortal; for self - for others; divine oath - no oath; many - one. old - new and subject to weakness - perfect for ever. We could also develop the writers thoughts on the permanent effects of the purification effected by Christ, the new Covenant he established, the new Temple where he resides and intercedes and his final return and its effects (cf Ch.9).

From the perspective of fullness what stands out in *Revelation* is the inseparable association of "the one who is seated on the throne" and the Lamb. God is repeatedly described as "the one who is seated on the throne" (4:2.9; 5:1.7.13...) - an image of universal sovereignty - and also as the "one who is, who was and who is to come" (1.4.8; 4:8; 15:17; 16:15) or as "Alpha and Omega, beginning and end" (1:8; 21:16; 22:13). The focus of the "narrative" running through the book is judgment and the new creation at the end of all time. The Lamb is given a variety of titles which are all significant and underline his role and the fullness gifted to him. He is the "faithful witness (his life and death), the first born from the dead (resurrection) and ruler or King of the earth" (sovereign and judge [1:5]). He is described as one like the Son of Man with divine prerogatives (1: 13-16). He introduces himself as the first and last, the living one who is alive forever, the king of death and Hades (1: 17-18). In the liturgical setting of the throne he is the "Lamb as if slaughtered" (5:6). He is acclaimed as the universal saviour (5:19).

The association of God and the Lamb is of great significance. The initiative and the goal of all remains with God, his Father. However there is the closest association. We find this expressed for example

in shared titles, the shared liturgical acclamation (cf.5: 13), and the 144,000 who have "his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads" (14: 1). Though judgment is made by God through "angels" yet the crucial figure is the Lamb who opens the scrolls and is described as "the rider of the white horse", "Word of God" and "King of Kings", Lord of Lords who in a terrible scene vanquishes all enemies (cf. 19:11-21). In the New Jerusalem there is no Temple, for its "Temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb" (21:22). There is neither sun nor moon for "the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb" (21:22). The throne of life from which the river of the water of life flows is shared by God and the Lamb (22:1-3). This inseparable association of God and Jesus Christ of which one expression is shared doxologies occurs not only in Revelation but also through the letters of the New Testament.

### **Paul**

We cannot escape the impression that Paul has looted the treasury of the First Testament to interpret Jesus crucified and raised. Metaphors and themes, which have been re-interpreted in the apocalyptic writings form part of his interpretation, as they do later with the Gospel writers. Aware of the character of the present as "this evil age" (Gal 1:4) Paul affirms that the fullness of time has arrived with the mission of the Son (Gal 4: 4; Rom 8:3). Through him God, faithful to his promises, transforms human history once and for all in a re-creative manner. Describing the risen Jesus Christ as the new/ second Adam Paul indicates that human history has as it were begun again. God's promises to Abraham and the hopes related to the Abraham story are no longer confined to Israel, as God is the impartial God of all. The liberation narrated within the Exodus story is only a shadow of the liberation effected in Christ. The sacrificial system with its climactic moment in the Day of Atonement becomes a backdrop to describe the expiating action of God in Jesus' death and the revelation of God's righteousness. The outstanding quality of God gathered into the term *chesed* (*hesed*) in various streams of Jewish thought dominates Paul's understanding of God's singular, superabundant and gratuitous action concentrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Grace" is a term that re-echoes in his letters. Promises related to the Spirit, new Covenant and new People are fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In Paul as in the remainder of the New Testament Jewish monotheism is not compromised. Israel has spoken of God's self-

expression in terms of God's wisdom, Word, Torah and God's image of whom "Adam" was the greatest expression. Paul draws on this background to state that Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection is the fullest and climactic expression of God's saving will for all. He will use the term image, glory, Son, last Adam, life-giving spirit to give expression to this reality. Jesus Christ enters into God's activity as creator and as redeemer.<sup>6</sup>

Paul's description of the state of Jesus Christ after the resurrection is also significant. The ideas merge into one another. Christ is Lord exalted and seated at God's right hand as intercessor for all. He will ultimately be sovereign over all powers, including death. At his Parousia he will share in God's role as universal judge (cf. 13:37-43; 25:31-46...). Finally he will hand over the entire cosmos as an ordered one to God the Father who will be all in all.<sup>7</sup>

### The Gospels

We shall pass on to the Gospels. In Matthew's origin narrative many threads from the First Testament are woven together to present Jesus as the Messiah-Son of Jewish expectation. Jewish history comes to its climax with the advent of the Messiah (Mt 1:1-17). The universality of his mission and the relevance of his teaching come to expression through quotes from Isaiah and the use of the Son of Man traditions (4:12-16; 12: 28:18-20). He is also the eschatological king-judge fulfilling the Son of Man tradition and being endowed with God's own responsibility as the judge (13:37-43; 25:31-46). In a parable, which emphasizes the rejection of God's chosen messengers, the whole of Jewish history is summed up. The last messenger is the Son (Mt 21:37). Matthew also takes up the wisdom tradition to underline that Jesus as Son is the one who reveals the Father (11:25-30 and 11: 1: 9). The earthquakes at the death and resurrection symbolize the culminating action of God and its re-creative nature.

Mark identifies Jesus' ministry with the coming of the *kairos* of God and the presence of the Kingdom of God (1: 14-15). In a narrative full of symbolism he describes the cosmic scope of Jesus' healing

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6 Some aspects of these ideas are developed by James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapid, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 266-293.

7 See Dunn, *ibid.* pp. 313-314

ministry and the conquest of the great symbolic powers of evil, the sea in storm, a man possessed by the legion of demons, the death of a girl and an incurable blood disease (4:35-5:43). A series of events with echoes from the First Testament reveals that he is the Christ (6:30-8:29). He ushers in the promised Davidic kingdom, yet he is greater than David (11: 1-10; 12:35-37). He is the eschatological Son of Man (13:24-27; 14:62).

Luke's origin narrative is a rich fabric woven together with echoes from and explicit references to the traditions associated with Abraham-Sarah, David, Samuel- Hannah and other saintly just figures. The role and importance of the Spirit become very clear when we continue the narrative and include the Pentecost narrative. The eschatological moment has arrived. Jesus gathers together so many of God's promises and his activity and brings them to completion. Bringing about the great reversal implied in Mary's hymn his mission is described in terms of the fulfillment of Isaian promises (Lk. 4:18-19). The "must" of God's purposes imbedded in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, culminates in the resurrection and entrance into glory of the suffering Messiah (Lk. 24:26; cf. Acts 2:25-36; 3:18; 4:11.25-26... ). The ascension symbolizes the fullness of this mission that is still to be completed with Christ's Parousia.

The Lucan speeches, which recur at regular intervals within the narrative of the expansion of the early community, underline what God has done and the fulfilment of his purposes in Jesus' ministry, his death, resurrection and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:25-36). God has made the crucified Jesus "both Lord and Christ"(Acts 2:36.3:13-15; 4:10-12). Stephen sees Jesus as standing at the right hand of God (7:55-56).

In John's interpretation the idea of the fullness of God's saving self revelation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth pervades the narrative. The potential symbolic meaning in the first testament of the Temple, Passover, Feasts of Tabernacles (Ch.7) and Dedication (Ch. 10), manna, water and the Sabbath are all exploited to interpret Jesus. The pregnant "I am" becomes the vehicle of many explanations of Jesus' relationship with the Father and as the source of eternal life. The fullness of the Word who was with God is shared fully by the Word made flesh, sharing in the most intimate qualities of God - glory, grace, truth. The Word who was with God and was God is identified with the Word made flesh

who is the only begotten Son of the Father and who alone is able to completely reveal the Father and share Father's fullness with us. It is in this Word, identified as Son that the Father gives the most complete self-expression in human words and actions and shares the ultimate gift with believers. This gift is described in terms of being "children of God", eternal life or to share in the union of Word and God/ Son and Father.

### **The Asian Jesus Christ**

In his rich and evocative response to *Ecclesia in Asia* at the Cathedral in New Delhi Cardinal Darmaatmadja spelt out a New Way to be Church in Asia. He recalled how the Synod had spoken of apt ways of presenting Jesus Christ in initial proclamation. He listed some metaphors like Teacher of Wisdom, Healer, the Liberator, the spiritual Guide, the Enlightened one, the Compassionate Friend of the poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One... We could fruitfully re-read the Gospel stories and see how they portray Jesus living these roles in a simple, human and pre-eminent manner.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Son**

A term, which gathers around itself various central narratives, expectations and metaphors with reference to the past, present and future, is the Messiah. The way the New Testament writers understand it goes beyond the hopes of Israel. However, were I to take one metaphor from the New Testament which carries the basic insight of the central place of Jesus Christ in God's whole enterprise of saving the world I would take the term "the Son/ the only begotten Son/ Son of his love". I do not choose this term as one relating to systematic theologies of the Trinity. The term is symbolic and a very rich metaphor. It is used in very significant ways to interpret Jesus Christ in the majority of the writings. The metaphor has profound evocative power to express in a most striking way the intimacy of relationship between God and Jesus Christ, the quality of his participation in God's sovereign activity and the nature of responsibilities entrusted to Jesus Christ by the Father. In various ways the metaphor of "son" related to other symbols, metaphors and narratives expresses the central, reserved and universal role of Jesus Christ and his universality.

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8. Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, "A New Way of Being Church in Asia. *Vidyajyoti* 63 (1999) pp. 887-891

## The Undeniable Centrality of the Affirmation of Fullness and Jesus Christ

There is no strand of the New Testament in which Jesus Christ is not interpreted as the fulfilment of God's promises, the completion of God's plan of salvation, the person in whom so many narratives, metaphors, ritual and expectations converge. All the narratives of God's activity as creator and saviour and all the hopes rooted in these traditions converge in the beloved Son. He is the Word, the Image of God, and the wisdom of God. Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, raised and made to sit at the right hand of God will come to judge the living and the dead. God shares all his own exclusive activity with Jesus Christ, the Son. We can distinguish the Word with God from the Word made flesh (Jn 1:1-18). We can distinguish the beloved Son as the image of God through whom God creates all and as the crucified man in whose blood God reconciled all to himself and in whom all the fullness of God chose to dwell (Col. 1: 15-10). We cannot separate them.

We are forced by the New Testament evidence to affirm the reality of fullness and completion in Jesus Christ, the universality of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the biblical narrative of God, the Father of Jesus Christ and the Spirit. However, the emphasis in writings can be one-sided. There was an editorial recently in the *Tablet* commenting on the address Cardinal Ratzinger prepared for the Pope to use for addressing the Congregation of Doctrine of the Faith.<sup>9</sup> The writer comments on God's self-revelation in Christ and the fact that there is some ambiguity. The document emphasizes the fullness of revelation in Christ. However in *Fides et Ratio* the Pope has written of "that fullness of truth which will appear with the final revelation of God." He pointed out that Vatican II also insists on the ultimate fullness of revelation at the end of history. There is always 'a cloud of unknowing' and surely there is illumination in what is 'true and holy' in the world's great religions.<sup>10</sup>

### Cautions

The affirmation about fullness focuses our attention on God and the human race. The fullness of God found in the fullness of Jesus Christ assures us with absolute certainty of the quality of God's mercy, fidelity, love and power for the human family. It assures us that the great powers of evil, spelt out in the Bible in terms of death, sin, darkness,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Vidyajyothi*, April 2000

<sup>10</sup> Through a glass darkly, in *The Tablet*, 26th February 2000, p 259.

oppression... have been destroyed in a fundamental manner. The hidden face of God has been revealed so that our human race can never be burdened with a sense of divine ambiguity. The fundamental meaningfulness of human life and history is affirmed, removing all basic doubts. The biblical narrative of that expression of fullness manifested and found in the human mediator Jesus of Nazareth, Son, Christ and Lord is an invitation to find the manifestations of fullness embodied in many religious and human traditions. God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is the God of all.

The universality, which is a component of this fullness, is the affirmation of God's single purpose for the whole human race and the cosmos. The commitment of God to all peoples is concomitant to this affirmation. Therefore this demands that any authentic religious person will search to find the historical ways as to how God's universal purpose has been worked out in history. Obviously Christianity is only one of the historical ways in which this fullness of God in Christ with its universal embrace has and is being expressed. We are reminded here of the need to underline the universal purpose and fullness of the saving action of God for the whole human race. This needs to be distinguished from the historical expressions of this for large specific groups and for individual persons.

The fullness of God's saving action and purpose achieved in Jesus Christ reminds us of the essential role of historical mediations. Historical mediation challenges the Christian and any religious person to accept diversity and the fact that it cannot be God's purpose that one historical mediation will suffice for all periods of history, all nations and cultures and the complex variety of the human race.

The fullness in its many diverse expressions in the New Testament also is linked implicitly or explicitly with a basic affirmation of uniqueness of Jesus Christ in God's saving revelation and action. However, uniqueness does not demand exclusivity. Uniqueness is at the service of the affirmations of completeness, of universality and the necessity of historical mediation. The uniqueness is a crowning revelation of God, of God's purpose, the way God acts to save and the universality of commitment to the whole human race. Uniqueness is an invitation to ponder on inclusivity and the richness of the historical ways our human race has been experiencing God and has given and continues to give expression to this in the rich diversity of religions and their great inadequacies. These inadequacies are shared by all historical religions including the Christian churches.

A further point of importance is the question of discontinuity and continuity. The early Christian writers, with Paul and John as outstanding examples, strongly emphasize discontinuity for a variety

of reasons. However not only do all the writers build their interpretations of Jesus Christ on their traditional faith, but also the same God who revealed himself in the covenant with Israel continues his action in Jesus Christ. It is very difficult to affirm that God turned historical Judaism adrift after the coming of Jesus Christ. As was stressed in comments on John Paul's visit to Israel, the Church now recognizes Israel as the people of God's covenant, a covenant which according to some writers of the New Testament was revoked. However, how could God revoke his covenant? Has God revoked his ways with other religions because of his historical and transcendental action in Jesus Christ?

When the Christian Churches proclaim and witness to the fullness of Jesus Christ they ultimately wish to proclaim the fullness of God. The fullness of Jesus Christ is God's gift of God's own fullness to Jesus Christ and through him to the world. Paul reminds that God is to be all in all. The whole narrative of Jesus Christ is a witness to the depth, permanency, universality and historical nature of God's relationship to the world. This fullness expressed in Jesus Christ invites us to discover, respect and learn that the same God as Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ have been present with all in all religions. We must search for a "language" to express these great realities, respecting God's ways in ways that are intelligible to many religio-cultural groups. What *Ecclesia in Asia* needs is that Asian Episcopal pastors and theologians should re-read the mainly Western Document with its Western concerns about the uniqueness of Christ in authentic Asian ways. As a conclusion to his address Cardinal Darmaatmadja said:

Yes, it is true that there is no authentic evangelization without announcing Jesus Christ, Saviour of the whole human race. But for Asia, there will be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures. There is no full evangelization if there is no answer to the deep yearning of the peoples of Asia. There is no convincing and trustworthy announcement of Jesus as Saviour, unless along with, or even preceding this announcing, the Church presents the actual loving ministry of Jesus which rescues people from situations of injustice, persecution, misery and in the place of these brings life, yet even life in abundance.<sup>11</sup>

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# *Pūrṇam*: An all Inclusive Concept in the Indian World-view

Stephen C. Thadom

Stephen C. Thadom explores the concept *Pūrṇam* (fullness) from an Indian perspective. In the pluri-religious context of India this concept is much debated today. Exclusivistic claims are made by different religious traditions and systems. A subjective understanding of Fullness creates division and confusion, because each one will understand it according to his perspective. *Vedāntic* understanding of Fullness does not negate the existence of Fullness in the other. It is not an either-or approach but an inclusive one, accepting the possibility of experience of fullness in every reality. Fullness refers to the same reality which comes under the possible range of any human experience. This reality is *ekam*, there is no second to this. Dr. Stephen teaches at Sameeksha, the Jesuit Regional Theology Centre, Kalady.

## Introduction

The term *pūrṇam* has both empirical and transcendental bearings. Empirically considered *pūrṇam* is a limit concept and is subject to change. In its transcendental dimension *pūrṇam* is an all inclusive concept used as a continuum of the empirical dimension. The term *pūrṇam*, is usually translated into English as fullness, plenitude, complete, accomplished etc., but it has deeper and wider implications. In this paper we analyze the concept both from the empirical and transcedental perspectives. We start from the etymological analysis of the term, and proceed through the *Vedic*, the *Upaniṣadic* and the *Vedāntic* understanding of the concept in order to reach the transcendental meaning. An attempt is made in this paper to present the concept from an Indian world view.

The word *pūrṇa* comes from the root *pṛi-* *pūr* means to fill, to complete. The term is also used as a pre-fix, *pūrṇa candra*, *pūrṇa kāma*, *pūrṇa virāmam*, *pūrṇa pātrām* etc., in all such instances the completeness of the qualified word is intended. *Pūrṇata* as noun

means completeness, fullness, whereas *pūrnam* is the past participle of the verb *pūr* which means filled, full, accomplished, complete etc. The past participle form of the verb is capable of conveying a transcendental meaning.

### Fullness experienced in the empirical level

There are experiences of fullness in our day to day life which can give us a clear idea about the concept. Water in a pot is full and if it is poured into the ocean the fullness of the water in the pot merges with the fullness of the ocean. Similarly when the pot is broken the fullness of air in the pot merges with the fullness of air in the atmosphere. As rivers flow into the ocean and merge with the mighty ocean so too the liberated souls get absorbed into the transcendent person and lose their name and form. Just like the particular essence of a cow merges with the universal cowness so too fullness gets absorbed in the transcendental fullness. Bee collects nectar from different kinds of flowers to prepare honey. Nectar of each flower is complete in itself, but their particularity is not an impediment to the fullness of honey. Each particular nectar loses its individuality and becomes honey. As long as the nectar remains in a particular flower it assumes the shape and smell of that flower. But it loses its identity when it merges with honey. Similarly, self which is fullness, assumes different names and forms in the empirical existence. When the self is united with the universal Self, it is the universal self which exists not the individual self. The knowledge of this identity is hidden from the mortal self.

*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* gives the story of Indra and Virocana approaching Prajāpati for the knowledge of the self.<sup>1</sup> Prajāpati gave a clear indication that they might inquire further. "He, the Atman, indeed is seen in all these. Look at your own self in the water, and whatever you do not understand come and tell me." Both looked at the reflection in the water. "We see the self, we even see the hair and the nails", they exclaimed. Prajāpati made them put on the finest clothes and asked them to look at the reflection. He said the self is seen in these. The self is immortal, fearless, and that is Brahman. Prajāpati made them start their inquiry from the ordinary mundane experiences, and step by step led them to higher knowledge that is the experience of fullness. Virocana was satisfied with the knowledge of the external realities and refused to seek further whereas, Indra was not satisfied with the initial answers given by Prajāpati and went on inquiring further

1. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad Ch. Up. 8.7.1-7*

and at last he got the fullness of knowledge. Similarly *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* gives the story of the soul of a human who became mingled with the whole universe after death.<sup>2</sup>

### Fullness- a continuum of the empirical experience

The very creation itself was an experience of overflowing fullness for the creator. The foundational principle of the universe thought about itself, 'Let me now create the worlds!' and the multiplicity of being came into existence.<sup>3</sup> From blazing Ardor Cosmic Order came and Truth.<sup>4</sup> The multiplicity of being in this universe is the result of an inner urge of the primordial one, an experience of bliss.<sup>5</sup> To be in the state of fullness means to be beyond all forms of human existence characterized by all kinds of dualities.<sup>6</sup> Like rivers flowing into the sea, humans leave all individuality (*nama-rupa*) when they come to the supreme fullness, the *Puruṣa* (*Muṇḍ. 3:2.8*). One becomes Brahman oneself (*Muṇḍ. 3:2.9*). In such a state of existence one is infinitely free, in all worlds (*Chānd. 8:5.4*), becomes one with the supreme light, (*jyotiṣam jyotiḥ*, *Chānd. 8:3.4*) and attains the fullness of existence

Fullness in the transcendental level is the continuum of the empirical reality. Transcendental fullness comprehends all other fullness transcending them infinitely and encompassing them all. The connection between these two realms is that they interpenetrate each other and make a whole, a whole devoid of parts or divisions; an experience of oneness 'ekam sat'. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* describes a gradual process of attainment from a lower level to a higher one at the time of death.<sup>7</sup> In this passage there are five psychological principles *vāk*, *manas*, *jñāna*, *mahat* and *sānta*. Each of these is surrendered successively in order to reach the experience of fullness. The '*mahat*' or large Atman stands for the notion of fullness or completeness.

The concept of fullness is explained in different ways in the *Upaniṣads*. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and *Mahopaniṣad* presented fullness as pleasure. What is fullness, that is pleasure, *yo vai bhūma tat sukhām*.<sup>8</sup> The pleasurable is the fullness from the fullness.<sup>9</sup> According

2 *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.5.

3. *Tait. Up. 2. 6*

4 *Rg Veda* 10.190

5 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.1-3, *Tait. 2.7*

6 *Katha. 6.18*, *Mund. 3.2.9*, *Sve. 4.18*, *Brh. 3.1.3-6*, *5.10.1*.

7 *Ch. Up. 6.8.6*; *6.15.1-2*

8. *Chand.Up. 7.23.1*

9 *Mahopanisad*, 5.46 *pūrṇatpūrṇam sukhātmakam*

to *Bhamavidyopaniṣad*, *Nāradaparivrājakopaniṣad* and *Rāmottaropaniṣad* fullness is the supreme knowledge. Fullness is the knowledge of the self<sup>10</sup>; Fullness is the knowledge that I am that Brahman<sup>11</sup> and fullness is the awareness that I am the fullness, I am the auspicious, I am the non-dual form.<sup>12</sup> *Tejobindhupaniṣad* stressed the distinction between the fullness and non-fullness.<sup>13</sup> For *Siddhāntopaniṣad* Fullness is the Lord without *māyā* it is the perfect bliss.<sup>14</sup> *Varāhopaniṣad* and *Pañcabrahmopaniṣad* presented Fullness as unified state of consciousness and perfect self consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Upaniṣads generally presented the concept Fullness as pleasure, as self knowledge, as non-duality, as bliss, as the Lord, as the auspicious, and as the Brahman or Atman. Fullness is an all embracing concept pointing to the Ultimate principle. Empirical fullness though a limited concept, crosses over the limit and merges into the transcendental fullness. The macrocosmic universe transcends its limits and becomes one with the transcendental fullness which is supreme bliss, the Lord himself. The notion *sānta* or *Turīya* or *ānanda* is Fullness itself. One who has perceived that which is without sound, without touch, without form, without decay, without taste, eternal, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the Large (*mahataḥ param*), and permanent is freed from the laws of death.<sup>16</sup> Such a person has reached the experience of Fullness.

In the Upaniṣadic literature fullness was not considered merely as a realm totally segregated from the empirical realm. The rites, ritual and the world at large<sup>17</sup> were considered as stepping-stones to the transcendental realm of fullness. The transcendental and immanent dimensions of the Ultimate reality merge into One, the ultimate principle. Upaniṣadic strands converge into a single unitive vision of reality, i.e. Brahman-Atman. Upaniṣadic seers through their mystic intuition

10 *pūrṇānandaikabhodho'ham- Bhamavidyopaniṣad.* 100

11 *pūrṇānadaikaibhodhstadbrhamahamasmi.Nāradaparivrājakopaniṣad.* 3.78

12 *pūrno'ham śivo'ham advaitarupo'aham. Kāmarājopaniṣad.* 2.; *pūrṇānadaikaivijñānam. Rāmottaropaniṣad.* 4.1.

13 *Tejobindhupaniṣad*, *pūrṇāpūrṇā sadviddhi* 3.56; *pūrṇarupo mahānātma pritātma*, 4.63; *pūrṇatvamasti cetkiñcit pūrṇatvam*, 5.29

14 *pūrṇānada harirmāyārahitah puruṣottamah. Siddhāntopaniṣad.* 1

15 *Varāhopaniṣad*, *pūrṇamadvayamakhandacetanam* 3.7; *Pañcabrahmopaniṣad*, *pūrṇabodhakaram svayam*, 7

16 *Katha Up.* 3.15.

17. *Brh. Up.* 1.1.1

crossed over the divergent perception of Reality. They became partakers of the experience of 'fullness' Fullness they experienced both within and without and in the transcendental realm. The experience of fullness, for them, was an experience of richness, completeness, and totality. It was a depth experience an experience combined with interiority and continuity.

Human fullness is in the partaking of the transcedental fullness. There is an element of continuity and unchangeability in the notion of fullness. According to Advaitic tradition fullness is experienced in all its intensity during *Turīya*. An experience of cessation of duality which is the root cause of incompleteness. All sensations, fear, imperfections remain in the *vyāvahārikā* level of reality. Fullness is a perfect state of existence. As *Tejobindopaniṣad* says, "It is bliss, yet beyond all pleasure... free from the control of the organs of thought." The term *ānanda* becomes the best way of expressing the state of fullness. This is a positive state of experience with indescribable richness. Bliss is the very essence of Atman and it establishes an essential correlation between non-duality, plenitude and bliss.

Fullness is, experience in its totality in a liberated existence. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* presented this state of existence as being lifted to the region of the deity, and the seeker should partake of all happiness possible in that region.<sup>18</sup> *Svarga* was conceived a place of limitless enjoyment and immortality as contrary to the experience of mortality and sorrow. The experience of *svarga* is a continuation of the earthly life without its defects. There are no more desires to be fulfilled (*akāma* / *niṣkāma*) because, all desires are fulfilled (*āptakāma*).<sup>19</sup> He possesses all desires (*sarvakāma*) because all desires are contained in this state.<sup>20</sup> *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* gives a splendid description of fullness of existence as a positive state of experience.

The seer sees not death  
Nor sickness, nor any suffering;  
The seer sees Only the All  
Obtains the All, entirely.<sup>21</sup>

Bliss is derived from the plenitude of Being.<sup>22</sup> The metaphysical understanding of *Mukti* presented by *Rṣis* meant liberation from all

18 *etāsam eva devatānām salokatām sārṣṭitam sāyujyam gaccati Ch. 2.20.2*

19 *Brh. 4.3.21; 4.4.6*

20 *Ch. 8.1.5. sarvakāmamayah puruṣaḥ. Maitr. Up. 6.30*

21 *Chānd. Up. 7.26.2.*

22. *Chan. Up. 3. 14. 2,4*

limitations and partaking in the fullness of the absolute. The term *pūrṇam* is used in the *Rgveda* as fulfilled, accomplished, rich and abundant. In the *Samkhyana Gṛhayasūtra* it is used as concluded, in the *Mahabharata* as complete or all and in the *Sankhyana Brahmana* as satisfied, contented.

### The immanent and transcendent dimensions of fullness

The immanence and the transcendence of God is presented in the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* through a dialogue between the master and a student. The master asked the student to place a piece of salt in the water. Next day the salt was found missing. Master asked the student to taste the water from different sides of the vessel. The student found that the water was saturated with salt. The fullness of the salt was inseparably spread out in the water. So too is the presence of the fullness.

*Māṇḍukyopaniṣad* described fullness as *Turiya*.<sup>23</sup> Meditation on 'Om' is the means of the destruction of name and form in the final emergence<sup>24</sup>; meditation on 'Om' is the supreme way.<sup>25</sup> *Svetasvara Upaniṣad* brought out the immanence of God in the universe but at the same time presented,<sup>26</sup> God as beyond night and day; the vision of Brahman above and below. The fullness is attained through the immanence of the *Atman* in the body,<sup>27</sup> whereas the liberated soul mingles with the whole universe.<sup>28</sup> The Absolute is presented as beyond happiness and sorrow.<sup>29</sup>

Experience of the Vedic people at the fire altar and during various other ritual, experience during deep sleep, erotic and empirical pleasures, the final expectation that all miseries of this world will pass away and one will reach the eternal happiness, all these converge to one point that is the ecstatic experience of *ānanda*. *Ananda* is a continuum and the *summum bonum* of this worldly experiences. Bliss is the very being of the Absolute. According to *Bagavad Gita*, the Ultimate principle is neither immanent nor transcendent but both in a

23 *Māṇḍ* 2-7

24 *Māṇḍ* 1-12

25 *Katha*. 1.2.15-17 *Praśna* 6.5

26 *Sveta up.* 11.17; 4.18; *Māṇḍ Up.* 2.2.11

27 *Kaushitaki Up.* 4.20

28 *Māṇḍ Up.* 3.2.5

29 *Chānd.* 8.12.1

unique way. Though the Ultimate is the source and origin of all, it is not limited by anything.<sup>30</sup>

### Fullness as the very Being

*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* identified fullness with bliss. Sage Nārada approached Sanatkumara, the son of Brahma to be taught on the subject self. Nārada, though a knower of formulae (*mantravid*) was not a knower of the self (*ātmavid*). Sanatkumara explained to Nārada the necessary conditions for any human to be happy, that is performance of sacrifice, happiness and faith. The effective performance of a sacrifice demands deep faith (*śraddhā*) along with happiness of the performer. Sanatkumāra led his pupil through varying degrees of realization about the infinitude of the Absolute and the possibility of bliss to be experienced in the Atman. First he denied the greatness of the material world then he proceeded to the greatness of meditation of the infinity, infinity of space, infinity of the ego and the infinity of the Absolute Reality. Experience of the Absolute is the experience of Fullness

*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* equates fullness with happiness or pleasure, *yo vai bhūmā tat sukham*, what is fullness that is pleasure. *Bhūman* in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, (1.5.4) denotes the totality of *prāṇāś* representing abundance. Later in verses 7.23.1 and 7.24.1 the same word is used with the meaning of infinitude excluding all duality and it is opposed to small (*alpam*). “What is fullness (*bhūma*) is immortal, but what is small is mortal. There is pleasure in fullness, there is no pleasure in the small.” *Maitrāyaṇīya Upaniṣad* (6.28) equates this experience to that of the highest experience in yogic concentration. *Praśna Upaniṣad* (4.5) says that in the experience of deep sleep, which is an experience of *sukha*, the mind experiences greatness, *mahiṁānam anubhavati*. This is an experience of totality, of fullness, *sarvam paśyati, sarvah paśyati* he sees all, He, the all sees.

Different terms like *pūrṇa*, *bhūman*, *kṛtsna*, *vibhu*, *sarva viśva*, *kham* are used in the *Upaniṣads* to denote the concept fullness. Each of these terms expresses different aspects of this idea. *Pūrṇa*, usually is associated with the notion *ākāśa* because of its two qualities, i. e. full and unchanging (*pūrṇam apravartī*). In a clear contrast to the concept

30 By me, by my unmanifested form all this world is pervaded.

My self is the source and support of all beings, yet subsists not in them. Bagavad Gita 9.4 –5. See B G. 10.20. I am the self seated in the heart of every being. I of all beings am also the beginning, the middle and the end.

of *śūnyavāda*, the Ultimate reality pervades everything in this universe in an intangible manner. This whole universe is filled by that Person, *tene'dam pūrṇam puruṣeṇa sarvam. Sve. Up. 2.9.* The word *bhūman* occurs in the *Brāhmaṇās* with the meaning abundance, richness, wealth. *Bhūman* also means the infinite, the unlimited.

### Fullness, an unchanging reality

*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* gives the most famous passage on the concept Fullness.

<i>pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idam</i>	That is Fullness, this is Fullness.
<i>pūrṇat pūrṇam udacyate /</i>	From the Fullness, comes the Fullness
<i>pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya</i>	When Fullness is taken from the Fullness,
<i>pūrṇam evā 'vaśiṣyate //</i>	The Fullness alone remains. (5.1.1)

The above mentioned stanza was recited during the full and the new moon sacrifices (the *darśapūrṇa māsau*). This sacrifice symbolized the rhythmic filling and the emptying of the moon above which is having an intimate connection with the sacrifices performed in the world below. This stanza is generally given as *sāntipāṭha* in the *Īśa Upaniṣad* and often repeated in the Vedānta literature.

Man is on a pilgrimage in search of Fullness. Fullness in this world does not satisfy him fully. According to Sankara this search is *Brahmajījñāsā*, now therefore the desire of knowing brahman (*athāto brahmajījñāsā*).<sup>31</sup> *Brahmajījñāsā* lead one to intense desire for liberation-*mumukṣutva*. The visible aspect of Brahman (the manifested universe) is identical with the unmanifest. Both are fullness of reality. The manifested universe as relatively full and the unmanifested as absolutely full. This points to the fact that reality is full and non-dual. Brahman the unmanifest is the *adaḥ*, which is beyond name and form and all structures. Brahman is the transcendental principle which is the foundation and cause of all beings. Brahman is an integrated totality, the manifoldness of being is united in a single reality, Brahman *sarva ekam bhavanti*. Everything in this universe is interconnected in the fullness, *sarvam vai pūrṇam*.<sup>32</sup>

31 *Brahmasutrabhaṣya* 1.1.1 *athāto brahmajījñāsā*

32 *Sankara Brahmasutrabhaṣya* 1.9.3.3.

Yājñavalkya in his dialogue with his wife Matreyī stressed the unity aspect of fullness when he equated ātman to *kṛtsnaḥ prajñānaghana eva, the whole , a mass of consciousness*.<sup>33</sup> Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad says that in the state of deep sleep (*susuptasthāna*) the self becomes one and full (*ekībhūta*) a mass of consciousness *prajñānaghana*. In deep sleep one experiences bliss, it is the unification of the dispersed powers of the human, it is a re-conquest of one's wholeness *ekībhavanam*. All forms of individuality and duality disappear and one gets the awareness that, 'I alone am this all'.<sup>34</sup> Because he is selfless, he is to be thought as having no limit and no cause.<sup>35</sup> This is the highest goal, this is the highest world, the highest bliss.<sup>36</sup> The ātman in deep sleep becomes one single block of consciousness, is living on Bliss, enjoys Bliss.<sup>37</sup>

*Idam* is the nominative singular neuter of the demonstrative pronoun. *Idam* understood in this way refers to anything about which we can think off. Anything that might become an object of our intentionality. *Idam* in its totality is Nonbeing, *idam sarvam asi*, you are all this.<sup>38</sup> This whole world- whatever exists- both springs from that and moves by his breath, this is that.<sup>39</sup> Speaking about *adah* and *idam* in the context of Naciketas' inquiry after the supreme knowledge, Raimon Panikkar says:

...this is that," that is , that which you see and smell and think and will, that which comes within the range of your human experience, *this* is that, *this* is what you are looking for, *this* is that which transcends everything, that which is really beyond, that which is imperishable and absolute - except that you must really know the *this* and the *that*.<sup>40</sup>

The seeker has to know that this and that are one and the same reality.

33 *Bṛh. Up.* 2.4.1 ff, 4.5.1 ff.

34 *Bṛh. Up.* 4.3.20

35 *Maitrāyaṇīya. Up.* 6.20

36 *Bṛh. Up.* 4.3. 32

37 *Māṇḍukya Up.* 5

38 *Kaus. Up.* 1.6; *Katha. Up.* 6.2; *Rg Veda.*8.52.2

39 *Katha. Up.* 5.14

40 Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi. 1997. P.570

### Conclusion

Fullness includes both Being and Nonbeing. In the *vyāvaharikā* experience of existence, we experience division and separation because of the distinctive nature of our intelligence. A subjective understanding of Fullness creates division and confusion, because each one will understand it according to his perspective. Just like the rays of light get deflected when they pass through a thick glass, so too human experience of fullness varies according to the experiencer. The fullness of different musical sounds in a symphony or the different rays in a rainbow does not negate the fullness of the totality, instead it only complements the fullness.

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# **The Image of Jesus in The Church In Asia**

**Michael Amaldoss**

Michael Amaldoss SJ reflects on the *a priori* Christological assumptions of the document EA. With a linear view of the history of salvation it projects the image of Jesus as the fulfilment of the history of religions. It overlooks the horizons of the salvific movements of the divine Spirit in the plurality of religions and cultures. It underrates the humanity of Jesus with all its cultural and historical conditionings. More than the faith it is the metaphysical framework of the Greco-Roman culture that tends to absolutise Jesus and proclaim him as the absolute norm for all followers of different religions. Such a claim cannot find echo in the heart of Asia. Michael Amaldoss is Professor at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, 23, Rajnivas Marg, Delhi- 110054.

“Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the one and only Saviour for all peoples” - this phrase in the very first sentence of Chapter 2 of *The Church in Asia* on “Jesus the Saviour: A Gift to Asia” could be taken as a summary of the document’s image of Jesus. This is an affirmation of faith, which the Church has received as a gift from God, which it wishes to offer to Asia (10)<sup>1</sup>. The whole of chapter 2 is a meditation on this affirmation of faith. Let me, first of all, briefly summarise this chapter.

## **Jesus in *The Church in Asia***

In the very beginning the human life of Jesus is narrated. Jesus is “the God-Man in full possession of a human nature”. He lived like other human beings, though he called God *Abba!* He was close to the poor, the marginalized and the suffering people. “Divine compassion had never been so immediately accessible”. “A new family was being created under the Father’s all-embracing and surprising love.” Though

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1 The numbers within brackets, here and later in the article, refer to the numbers of the Document *The Church in Asia*.

he preached in a simple manner, "people recognized that he spoke with authority". He was put to death based on false testimony, but he rose from the dead. "Jesus fulfilled the will of his Father to reconcile all humanity to himself, after original sin had created a rupture in the relationship between the Creator and his creation." (11)

Jesus was able "to win salvation for all people" basically because of *who he is*, namely the second Person of the Trinity. "The saving action of Jesus has its origin in the communion of the Godhead". "In Jesus Christ alone dwells the fullness of God in bodily form (cf. Col 2:9), establishing him as the unique and absolute saving Word of God (cf. Heb 1: 1-4). As the Father's definitive Word, Jesus makes God and his saving will known in the fullest way possible." "The mission of the Saviour reached its culmination in the Paschal Mystery... Jesus destroyed sin by the power of his love for his Father and for mankind. He took upon himself the wound inflicted on humanity by sin, and he offered release through conversion." "Through Jesus' Paschal Sacrifice the *Father irrevocably offers reconciliation and fullness of life to the world*". (12)

"Through Jesus, man can finally know the truth of himself. Jesus' perfectly human life, devoted wholly to the love and service of the Father and of man, reveals that the vocation of every human being is to receive love and give love in return." In his Paschal Mystery", Jesus became once and for all both the revelation and the accomplishment of a humanity re-created and renewed according to the plan of God." The ultimate source of hope and strength for the people of Asia in their struggles and uncertainties is the realization that "by his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, in a certain way united himself with each individual".<sup>2</sup> "The mission of Jesus not only restored communion between God and humanity; it also established a new communion between human beings alienated from one another because of sin." Together with the Church throughout the world, the Church in Asia proclaims the truth of faith: "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim 2:5-6). (13)

"Through the Word, present to the cosmos even before the Incarnation, the world came to be (cf. John 1: 1-4, 10; Col 1:15-20). But as

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2 This last phrase is quoted from the document of the Second Vatican Council on *The Church in the Modern World*, 22.

the incarnate Word who lived, died and rose from the dead, Jesus Christ is now proclaimed as the fulfilment of all creation, of all history, and of all human yearning for fullness of life. Risen from the dead, Jesus Christ "is present to all and to the whole of creation in a new and mysterious way". In him, "values of all religious and cultural traditions, such as mercy and submission to the will of God, compassion and rectitude, non-violence and righteousness, filial piety and harmony with creation find their fullness and realization".<sup>3</sup> "Even for those who do not explicitly profess faith in him as the Saviour, salvation comes as a grace from Jesus Christ through the communication of the Holy Spirit" "Jesus is indeed unique, and it is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance." (14)

### ***An a priori Affirmation***

As we can see this is a very clear statement of the Vatican's view of Jesus as the unique and therefore the universal mediator of salvation for all human beings. The document is sure that "contemplating Jesus in his human nature, the peoples of Asia find their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered" (14). If this is so, one wonders why there is no big rush among the Asian people to become disciples of Jesus and to join the Church. This should certainly make us reflect a little more on our claims, If John Paul II prays that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium "*a great harvest of faith will be reaped*" in Asia (1) one would like to know the 'signs of the times' on which such a prayer is based. Is the fact that Jesus was an Asian going to make any difference to his acceptance as the only Saviour by Asian peoples?

The first impression that an Asian has in reading these statements is their *a priori* nature. It is not that one disagrees with what they want to say. But after having said: "The Synod Fathers noted that proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour can present particular difficulties in their cultures, given that many Asian religions teach divine self-manifestation as mediating salvation" (10)<sup>4</sup>, one would expect that the document would take into account this reality and would reflect on its own faith affirmation in this new context. On the contrary, what we have is an affirmation of faith that could have been made anywhere in the world at

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3 One can note in this list values picked up from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

4 See also No. 20.

any time, not only in what it says positively about Jesus and his significance, but also in what it says about other religions. Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, responding to the presentation of the document by John Paul II in Delhi, said: "Yes, it is true that there is no authentic evangelization without announcing Jesus Christ, Saviour of the whole human race. But for Asia, there will be no complete evangelization unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures."<sup>5</sup> Should not such dialogue with other religions help us to interpret our faith tradition and to revise our formulations? Asian (Indian) theologians have attempted such reformulations. The Indian Theological Association in a Statement (April 1998) on "The Significance of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism in India" had this to say:

In the context of our positive experience of other believers in their search for and realization of wholeness and freedom, we acknowledge the gracious and loving act of God who has reached out to them in various ways... Celebrating this gracious and living mystery of God, we are not only aware of the Spirit of God "who blows where She wills", but also of the Word of God who speaks to peoples through various manifestations in different ways (Heb 1:1), and whom we profess as the one who became incarnate in Jesus. We gratefully acknowledge that it is our experience of the incarnate Jesus that leads us to the discovery of the cosmic dimensions of the presence and action of the Word... For the Christian believer, Jesus Christ is the perfect symbol of God who brings fulfilment to all persons in their world through his words and works, signs and wonders. He is unique to the Christian in that he is the definitive, though non-exhaustive symbol of God-experience in the world. But Jesus' uniqueness does not necessarily displace symbols in other religions... The vision of all the saving movements in the world as manifestations of the one divine mystery, of the one Word and the one Spirit of God, urges us to be open to the religious experience of others and to dialogue with them... We hear the call of Jesus to contribute through the process of dialogue and convergence to a growing reconciliation and peace with justice...<sup>6</sup>

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5 CCBI News 10 (1999) 92.

6 Nos. 5.14-5.20, *passim*. See *Word and Worship* 31 (1998) 352-353.

We can immediately see the difference in tone and perspective. I do not intend to contest what the document *Church in Asia* is saying. Our reflection takes place through images and paradigms that are based on our experience. The way that the document understands its faith affirmation and explains it may have a certain validity from the point of view that it has adopted. But Asians from their multi-religious context understand and explain their faith in a different way. Let me try to point out some of the differences.

### A Limited View of Salvation History

The document operates with a linear view of the history of salvation. Jesus and Christianity are seen as the fulfilment of the other religions. In the Bible we have the paradigm that relates Israel to Jesus (and the Church) as preparation to fulfilment. Jesus is the Messiah foretold by the Prophets. The document projects this paradigm on all the world's religions. In this view the non-Judaic religions are actually pre-Judaic in significance. They have some natural revelation, at the most some seeds of the Word. They might even be considered as illegitimate now that we have the definite and full revelation in Jesus, who has said the last word. I think that this extrapolation of a Jewish-Christian paradigm to the other religions is improper. If it is true that "the Church's approach to other religions is one of genuine respect" and that 'this respect is twofold: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man'<sup>7</sup>, then what right has any one to prejudge the extent and meaning of the activity of the Spirit in other religions? The New Testament tries to show how Jesus fulfils the expectations of Israel. Who can credibly show that Jesus (or the Church) actually fulfils the 'authentic values' of Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism?<sup>8</sup> This is a totally *a priori* vision of history. Some missionaries in India have tried to show that Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism.<sup>9</sup> But people like Abishiktananda who have actually tried to experience Hinduism gave

7 *The Church in Asia*, 20. The reference is to a speech that John Paul II made to the leaders of other religions in India in 1986.

8 Cf. *The Church in Asia*, '14.

9 Cf. J.N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*. (Oxford, 1913); P. Johanns, *To Christ through the Vedanta*. (Ranchi, 1944)

up such an approach.<sup>10</sup> In any case, one does not see any Hindus or Buddhists waiting to be fulfilled by Christianity. As a matter of fact every religion sees itself as a fulfilment of others. Buddhism will consider all religions as irrelevant. Hinduism will see *advaita* as the final stage in spiritual realization. I think that these kinds of 'comparative' approach must be avoided, especially when we see that the majority of humans are finding meaning and fulfilment in their lives in and through their own religions.

### Divinizing of the Humanity of Jesus

I think that the reason for such *a priori* affirmations is a certain divinization of the humanity of Jesus. Encountering Jesus one experiences God active in him. Jesus is recognized as divine because only God can save. As a matter of fact the document itself offers a clear example of this when it asserts that Jesus Christ saves because of *who he is*, namely the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Salvation is a Trinitarian action in which the Father, the Son and the Spirit have their role. (12) But as soon as Jesus is identified with the Son, the humanity of Jesus and its limitations, freely chosen by God who 'emptied himself' (Phil 2:7) is forgotten. As the Word or Son he can only be the fullness of revelation and salvation. One can say that attributes like uniqueness and universality are given to Jesus precisely in so far as he is divine. Though it is affirmed that Jesus is human like us in all things except sin, he is freed from human, cultural and historical conditionings. He promised to send the Spirit who will lead the disciples into all truth (John 16:13). He inaugurates a Kingdom whose fulfilment is in the future, when he will come again (Matt 25:31). His work of salvation takes place in history, historically. Paul speaks of a process of reconciliation or unification that is still going on (I Cor 15; Eph 1: 10; Rom 8). This whole historical-eschatological dimension is lost when the mystery of salvation is reduced to the Paschal Mystery. This historical dimension and the limitations of the humanity of Jesus are also lost when Jesus is seen as uniting himself to every human being in some mysterious way through his incarnation or when the risen Jesus is said to be present to all in a new and mysterious way (13, 14). These affirmations are based on platonic anthropology and the term 'mystery' is used to hide the fact that we do not know what it is or how it happens.

10 Cf. Le Saux, Henri (Swami Abhishiktananda), *Ascent to, the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary of Swami Abhishiktananda*. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998)

Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. But the presence and action of the Word, as that of the Father and of the Spirit, encompass the whole of history. The fact that the Word became incarnate in Jesus gives a special status to Jesus in the history of salvation. But it does not reduce the activity of the Word to the activity of Jesus before, during and after the life of Jesus on this earth. The Word is also active in other religions, as the Indian theologians point out. The action of the incarnate Word in Jesus has to be set in the context of the action of the Word in the whole world. The latter can neither be reduced to the former nor seen either as a preparation for it or a working out of it. The Council of Chalcedon said that the two natures in Jesus must "neither be separated nor be confused". But the tendency in the Western Church has been towards a Christology of pre-existence in which the divine person of the Son takes on a human nature. But all the actions are of the divine person and the human nature does not really seem to have an identity of its own, except to mediate the divine action. In the name of the unity of the person the human nature loses its distinct identity. The document says as much. "Jesus is our Saviour in the fullest sense of the word because his words and works, especially his resurrection from the dead, have revealed him to be the Son of God, the pre-existent Word, who reigns for ever as Lord and Messiah." (11) Jesus gets eternalized: "From the first moment of time to its end, Jesus is the one universal Mediator." The name 'Jesus' here refers not to the human Jesus, born two thousand years ago, but to the divine person. The document goes on to say: "We believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is the one Saviour because he alone - the Son - accomplished the Father's universal plan of salvation. As the definitive manifestation of the mystery of the Father's love for all, Jesus is indeed unique." (14) The uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour depends on the fact that he is God. It is equivalent to saying that God is the unique Saviour, because the Father and the Spirit too are involved in the act of salvation.

### **A Transcendental Saviour?**

The action of a divine person, even mediated by a human nature, transcends space and time. So Jesus' saving action seems to have a transcendental character. As I have already pointed out, according to the document, both by his incarnation and by his resurrection Jesus is linked to every human being in some mysterious manner. Jesus Christ's unique and universal salvific action is also explained in another

way. Jesus takes "upon himself the sins of the world - past, present and future" (11) and "on the Cross... breaks the power of the self-destructive resistance to love which sin inflicts upon us" (13). "In this way, salvation was sealed once and for all" (11). The merits of Jesus' saving action is distributed to every one, whether s/he lived before or after Jesus. This view has often led to an individualist approach to salvation. Loving and doing justice in the world are then seen as the consequence of being saved.

Today we tend to have a more historical-eschatological view of salvation. History is a process of struggle between God and Mammon. All peoples and all religions are engaged in this in their own way. God too is actively involved in this struggle through the Word and the Spirit. Through this struggle God is leading all things to a unity when God will triumph and will be all in all. In Jesus God is committing Godself to the battle in a human, historical way. Jesus, in his life, work and death shows a particular way of carrying on this struggle by opting for the poor and the oppressed. The disciples of Jesus continue his mission of prophecy and servanthood by helping build human communities of freedom and fellowship, justice and peace. In this task they find in the members of other religions allies and not enemies. They too have a positive role in the history of salvation. The real enemies are Satan and Mammon. The Kingdom is God's gift, but is also our task. Victory in the struggle, fullness of salvation, the establishing of the Kingdom - all these are in the future, at the end of history. They remain the horizon within which we keep on struggling. The fullness of revelation and salvation are not in the past, but in the future. Other religions, too, in which the Spirit of God is present and active, contribute to the consummation. Jesus neither replaces them nor excludes them.

### Conclusion

The document keeps on insisting: "There can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord... The Church evangelizes in obedience to Christ's command, in the knowledge that every person has the right to hear the Good News of the God who reveals and gives himself in Christ." (19, 20) Christians in Asia, without denying that God reveals and gives himself in Christ, have reason to believe, because of their experience of people of other religions and the fruits of the Spirit manifest in their lives, that God has also revealed and given Godself to other peoples through other mediations in other religions. People indeed have a 'right' to hear the Good News. But for over two thousand years people in Asia, especially those belonging to the 'great' religions of Asia, have also affirmed their

'right' to follow their religions, even when exposed to Christianity. They have not experienced Christianity as a 'fulfilment'. I would think that this experience should lead us to reflect on what really is the plan God has for the world and what is the role of other religions in it and what is the place of Jesus in the midst of the religions.

We Christians have every right to proclaim and share our experience of God in Jesus. We tell people who Jesus was, how he lived, healed and reconciled people, empowered the poor, made people experience a God who was not a judge, but *Abba*, a loving Father, washed the feet of his disciples and loved people even unto death. We proclaim the story of a person. We do not proclaim a dogmatic conclusion: "Jesus is the unique Saviour!". Even the document acknowledges that 'the proclamation of Jesus Christ can most effectively be made by narrating his story, as the Gospels do'. (20) But unfortunately, for the document, it is only a *pedagogy*. It seems more interested in the "ontological notions involved". Perhaps it is here that Asian Christians must challenge the document. The "ontological notions" are the conclusions of a particular community that lived at a particular time in a particular culture using a particular metaphysical system. Why should they be identified with the Good News? It is time that Asian Christians explored the meaning of Jesus Christ in the context of the Asian experience of a pluralism of religions rather than simply extrapolate conclusions arrived at in a different context.

One of the problems in talking about the 'uniqueness of Christ' is that it seems to lead imperceptibly to talk about the 'uniqueness' of the Church. It is no surprise that the document speaks about "the universal saving significance of the mystery of Jesus and his Church". (20)

We are called to proclaim and witness to Jesus Christ, not to a Christology. We are expected to share an experience, not to repeat a creed. We are invited to recognize, respect and accept the rich experience of God that the others have in their religions before talking to them about our own experience of God in Jesus Christ. Globalization that does not respect local identities and differences is bad not merely in economics and politics, but also in religion.

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# **Church and Mission in Asia In the Light of *Ecclesia in Asia* A Critical Study**

**Jacob Kavunkal**

Jacob Kavunkal SVD examines with an Asian sensitivity the theological language of EA. In the Synod the Asian bishops advocated a pastoral-practical approach to mission; but the EA takes a predominantly doctrinal approach that comes from the Greco-Roman heritage. In the overpreoccupation to proclaim Christ as the one and only Saviour 'for all peoples' EA leaves out of focus the liberative ministry of Jesus, that can have a transforming effect on the modes of life and forms of culture in Asia. Jacob Kavunkal SVD is Professor at the Jnanadeep Vidyapeeth, Pune 411014, India.

At the very outset, it has to be clarified that the following reflections are evolved out of encouragement given by the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*: "theologizing is to be carried out with courage, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Church's Tradition in sincere adherence to the Magisterium and with an awareness of pastoral realities" (n.22). It is also to be mentioned that my comments are specifically from an Indian context.

Rightly, the entire document is geared to the Church's mission in Asia. This is done in the context of the fact that the biblical account of salvation has its beginnings in the Asian soil and Christianity has its roots in Asia. The document celebrates the fact that Jesus Christ took flesh as an Asian. The proclamation of this Jesus Christ to Asia is the Church's "unique contribution to the peoples of the continent" (n.10). The first part of the document paints the doctrinal perspectives, in the line of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. This is followed up by a description of the practical consequences for mission and its concrete expressions in Asia.

## **Jesus Christ the one and only Saviour**

According to *Ecclesia in Asia*, Church's mission is not just a

proclamation of Jesus or witnessing to the Gospel (Lk 24:48-49; Act 1:80); it is proclaiming Jesus Christ "as the one and only Saviour for all peoples" (n.10). In fact a careful reading of the first part of the document makes it clear that this proclamation of Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour is the chief concern of the document. Within the first 21 numbers nearly 30 times Jesus Christ is qualified as the "only Saviour" or "the Redeemer". This requires some further explanation.

Ever since the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Cardinal Jozef Tomko's description of India as "the epicentre of (certain theological) tendencies and Asia their main territory", there has been a sort of mistrust of the Indian/Asian theologians on the part of the Vatican.<sup>1</sup> According to it these theologians do not believe in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour. Hence we come across the curial concern to emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus Christ at every instance. This in turn has caused a tension between the curial concern and the pastoral requirements of Asia. This tension is manifested in the very title of the Asian Synod, "Jesus Christ the Saviour and His mission of Love and Service in Asia". One comes across this tension both in the Orientation Paper (*Lineamenta*) as well as the Working Paper (*Instrumentum Laboris*) of the Asian Synod.

Naturally the tension found its way to the Synod hall as well. Asian Bishops in their interventions emphasized the need for taking more "practical" approach to mission as Jesus himself did and called for a "gospel that is embodied in our lives which can carry much more credibility and power of conviction than a Gospel that has only been wrapped up in beautiful words, teachings and moral injunctions".<sup>2</sup> This conflict of interests is continued in the post-synodal document as well.

According to the traditional understanding as to what makes Jesus Christ the unique saviour is his redeeming death and resurrection. In the words of *Ecclesia in Asia*, "God took upon himself our human nature and endured suffering and death to win salvation for all people" (n.12). Hence for the Church in Asia to fulfil its mission "preaching of

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1. Cardinal Jozef Tomko, "Proclaiming Christ the World's only Saviour", *L'Osservatore Romano*, (Eng.), April 15, 1991, p.4. Partly the description was a misrepresentation. For instance what the Cardinal quoted as an Indian theologian's views on conversion was in fact only that which the concerned theologian described as the Hindu view of conversion.
2. Cf. *The Examiner*, May 16, 1998, p.4

the saving Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ must be [its] absolute priority" (n.2). This in turn makes the Church as the community of the saved, into which all are to be incorporated, as the body of Jesus Christ. Hence the document hopes: "just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent." (n.1).

It is precisely this claim of uniqueness for Jesus Christ and the Church, denying the salvific value of other religions, which makes Church's mission objectionable to the followers of other religions in Asia. This insistence on the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the unique Redeemer and the desire to make the fruits of the Paschal Mystery available to all in the Church, makes mission a laughing stock in a pluri-religious context. Reacting sharply to the papal hope for the third millennium that we quoted earlier, Narendra Mohan, Member of Parliament and the editor of many *Bharatiya Janata Party* publications, wrote: "If we implement the belief of the great religious leader the Pope John Paul II for the next millennium we will divide the world and will invite conflict. The views of Pope to convert the world only to Christianity is contrary to the concept of Universal Brotherhood. It is contrary to the "Freedom of Conscience".<sup>3</sup>

*Ecclesia in Asia* is aware how the proclamation of "Jesus as the only Saviour is fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties, especially in light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views" (n.20). However instead of understanding these problems, the Document presents these challenges as "as an even greater incentive in striving to transmit the "the faith that the Church in Asia has inherited from the Apostles and holds with the Church of all generations and places" (n.10). For committed followers of Asian religions it amounts to outright arrogance and blind superiority. No wonder *Ecclesia in Asia* was described by them as " a chauvinistic, offensive and presumptuous document".<sup>4</sup>

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3. Narendra Mohan, "Religious Harmony in the Third Millennium", (Paper presented at the World Conference on Religious Freedom, New Delhi, November 16-18, 1999).
4. Balchandra Rao, "Church Sticks to the Old Goals", *Indian Express*, November 13, 1999, p.6. Several writers in the National and Regional Dailies expressed similar sentiments.

## The Mission of Jesus

Recent scripture scholars have shown how the death of Jesus Christ was both caused by his ministry and was the logical consequence of it. Jesus invested the time of his public life in a ministry of "going about doing good" (Peter's summary of the ministry, Act 10:38) and forming a group of disciples, the Church, to continue his ministry (Jn 20:18-20). It was a ministry of compassion, love, justice and other-centredness. He showed how the God whom he experienced as the "Abba" (intimate parent) was other centred and hence the sabbath laws and similar rules of purity and observances are to be interpreted in terms of human beings and not in terms of the laws themselves. For God is concerned about the well-being of humans, especially of the lost, the broken hearted, the marginalized, etc. *Ecclesia in Asia too describes* beautifully this ministry in number 11.

However, the protagonists of Judaism took him to be a threat to their religion and to themselves. Therefore, as *Ecclesia in Asia* also puts it, "he was accused of being a blasphemer, a violator of the sacred Law, a public nuisance to be eliminated". In fact this plotting to destroy him had its beginning already from the start of his ministry (Mk 3:6). His death was seen as a failure of his ministry. But God intervened and raised him up from the dead as the approval of his ministry (Act 2:24, 32, 36). Thus, the ministry that he accomplished from the time of his baptism becomes crucial. Hence Peter laying down the qualification for the one for replacing Judas says: "one who has accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us" (Act 1:21-22).

Whatever was his metaphysical identity, an issue that became acute only during the Greek inculuration, Jesus' own self perception was that of a prophet (Mk 6:4; Mt 13:57). He contrasts himself with Elijah and Elisha (Lk 4:24-27). Jesus stood in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, finally represented by John the Baptist, though different from him. His contemporaries too perceived him as the prophet from Nazareth (Mt 21:11; Mk 8:28; Mt 16:14; Lk 7:39). It is unfortunate that *Ecclesia in Asia* did not pay much heed to this aspect of the mission of Jesus, especially since it is very vital in the context of Asia that the Document paints in the first chapter. The concern of Jesus is not so much with Christian doctrines as with the enduring elements that can actively direct or influence human lives at any time.

Asia needs the prophetic ministry as the synodal interventions also emphasized. What Asia encounters frequently is the poor whose humanity is assaulted, despoiled and left half dead on the edges of Asian societies. Upholding their humanity is the primary Christian commitment in Asia. Though the document showed very well how the historical and geographical context of Jesus exercised an important influence on his mission (n.5), when it comes to the Church's mission in Asia, this is not followed up. This, in spite of the fact that the Synod Fathers had insisted on the Church's mission of love and service in Asia in the social, political, religious, cultural and economic realities of Asia (n.5). The dispossessed indigenous peoples of Asia, the marginalized dalits, the ill-treated women of Asia, the children of Asia who live away their tender childhood years working hard, the victims of terrorization and violence, all wait to hear the prophetic voice of the Asian Church.

### **The Salvation Motive**

As we have seen, according to *Ecclesia in Asia*, mission in Asia is the proclamation of Salvation that comes only through Jesus Christ. Even if other religions have authentic values, these "find their fullness and realization [in Jesus Christ]" (n.14). Even the presence of the Holy Spirit "in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ" (n.15, n.20).

One wonders if we can go beyond this position, based on the biblical narratives. In the Bible God's redemptive action in the world begins already with creation and continues all through history including the Christ event. The Incarnation, as we saw earlier, was geared to the ministry of manifesting God's fullest form as far as human beings can grasp it (RM 5).

Based on the biblical revelation a Christian believes that the Mystery of Jesus Christ is the only mediation between God and humans. At the same time based on the same revelation, one cannot restrict that mediation, that salvation, to Christianity alone, for the Mystery that is identified as Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition, is operative in all creation (Jn 1:1-3; Col 1:14-20) and in all religions in so far as that Mystery is "enlightening every human being coming into the world" (Jn 1:9). We prefer to speak in terms of the "Mystery" for two reasons. For one thing, in spite of the revelation in Jesus Christ, on

earth we can never fully grasp all the workings of that Mystery. On the other hand "Mystery" will be more acceptable to the followers of other religions. In a pluri-religious context what we speak must be understandable also to the followers of other religions.

### **Mission in Asia**

In the light of what we have said it is clear that though according to the New Testament a Christian can and must believe that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator, in so far as all are participants in that Mystery identified as Jesus Christ, we must refrain from making claims of uniqueness in a religiously pluralistic context. What the Gospels describe is the ministry of the Incarnate Lord. The community's mission is the continuation of that ministry. In this way we preserve the true missionary vocation of the Church without in any way denying the value of other religions. This does not mean that all religions are same or equal. For the perception and response to the Mystery need not be same in all religions. The former head-hunting Naga religion cannot be equated with a religion like Buddhism. The response to the Mystery is mixed with human selfishness and frailty, which can be true also of Christianity. Yet the church is called "to serve human beings by manifesting to them the love of God made present in Jesus Christ" (RM 2). The church, thus, "remains an icon of the service to life in Asia, in courageous contrast to the many dark forces at work in [Asian] society" (n.7).

It follows from what we have said that it does not make sense to claim that the values in other religions or the "intense yearnings for God, experienced in Asia, are to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They are the result of the presence of the Mystery of Jesus Christ and it would only be presumptuous to say that it "can only be fully satisfied by Jesus Christ", or to make this yearning as the justification "to proclaim with vigour in word and deed that Jesus Christ is the Saviour" (n.9). Or else we should also be prepared to accept that the yearning for God in Christianity has to be fulfilled in the Asian Religions! In fact the current exodus from the West to the East in search of spiritual experience, makes such a conclusion even more logical.

Similarly it would be better to refrain from expressions like: "the heart of the church in Asia will be restless until the whole of Asia finds its rest in the peace of Christ, the risen Lord" (n.10). They can only be damaging to the cause of the church's mission in Asia. As the Bishops

of Japan wrote in their response to the *Lineamenta*, "If we stress too much that 'Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour', we can have no dialogue, common living or solidarity with other religions".<sup>5</sup>

It is only right that the church in Asia distances itself from this sort of expansionistic mission which is a hangover from the colonial thinking. We have to become reconciled to the fact that salvation is the work of God who makes it available to humans through His "Vak" (Word), and that the mission of the church is to continue the mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Then we will realize that it is a tremendous obligation than any claim of superiority or arrogant monopoly. Such a mission of service is more demanding though less romantic.

This does not mean that the Church is not interested in giving rise to communities. Asia always had appreciation of Jesus Christ. Many will be attracted by our Christian life and want to commit themselves fully to the Lord in the community. Such a mission takes place in the climate of good will and collaboration. It does not share the language and spirit of *Ecclesia in Asia*. As Pope John Paul II told the leaders of the non Christian religions at Delhi on November 7, 1999, "Religion is not and must not become a pretext for conflict particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identities are involved. Religion and peace go together". He went on to say "Religion is the source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace. This is the only way to honour God".<sup>6</sup> The Pope concentrated on the love of God and stressed "our common origin and common destiny and the shared responsibility for peoples' well-being and progress, our need of the light and strength that seek in our religious convictions." As the *Vidyajyoti* "Editorial" has shown, though the Pope did not mention Jesus Christ, "it was an announcement of good news that set a pattern for the mission of the Church in Asia".<sup>7</sup>

One does not come across this sensitivity that the Pope exercised while addressing the leaders of non Christian religions, in the document *Ecclesia in Asia*. True, in the first chapter it portrays the Asian context, especially the religious context. However it has no impact on the document's prescription for proclamation. Here one finds the typically western triumphalism and exclusivism.

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5. Cf. Edmund Chia, "The "Absence of Jesus" in the VII FABC Plenary Assembly", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol.63/12, 1999, p.896.

6. Cf. *Vidyajyoti*, Vol.63/12, 1999, p.885.

7. "Editorial", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol.63/12, 1999, p.880.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ must take place primarily through the life-style of the Christians. It is not a frantic effort to save Jesus Christ from other saviours by trumpeting truths about Jesus Christ. The Church must stand for what Jesus Christ stood for and worked for the realization of God's reign on earth, which was the foundational theme of Jesus' work. A sheer proclamation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ will turn out to be a religious competition which in the Asian context can only lead to fanaticism and religious violence, the opposite of the divine reign! The "new life in Jesus Christ" is the quality of the lives of the Christians and not a claim made over the followers of other religions. Christian mission in Asia must become a Love-affair and not a Truth-affair.

There is great wisdom in the document's recommendation of the value of personal contact. It was the methodology of Jesus himself and that of the early church. It was also the method of sharing religious experience in India in its classical periods as can be known from the very name *Upanishads*. Literally it means the teaching, experience transmitted by sitting close by. Today too it has relevance in India and would be more effective than megaphonic proclamations.

### **Inculturation: a Means or Mission?**

In the context of the Proclamation of Jesus Christ *Ecclesia in Asia* advocates the need for inculturation. "The presentation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour needs to follow a *pedagogy* which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery" (n.20). For this purpose the Document cites the examples of John of Montecorvino, Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili.

This type of inculturation becomes peripheral and self-centred. The justification for inculturation is getting the message across. However praiseworthy the experiments of Matteo Ricci and Robert de Nobili were, it cannot be denied that what inspired them to cultural adaptation was not so much the love of the respective cultures or the right of these cultures, but to make Christianity acceptable to the upper and aristocratic classes. This is not the true principle of inculturation. The point of departure for inculturation is the autonomy of the given culture, in so far as it is the God-intended means of unfolding the capabilities of a given group (GS 53), giving them identity and rootedness. Culture, taken integrally, is the fundamental givenness in mission. That is the

reason why the first Jerusalem Council decided that no unnecessary burden is to be imposed on the gentile cultures (Act 15:28). The question is not so much how best the message can be conveyed, but how the culture can be transformed so that it becomes more humane and life-giving. Hence, Paul VI defined evangelization in terms of evangelizing cultures (EN 20).

Thus inculturation becomes an other-centred process. It is a process through which the Gospel becomes a life-giving element for each culture, especially for the victim of the selfishness of the respective cultures. Hence it is a process of making the message of Jesus Christ a good news to the people, especially those on the periphery. The parable of the good Samaritan verifies inculturation today (Lk 10:25ff). In a way the entire ministry of Jesus was a transformation of the Jewish culture. It was identification, identifying with the poor and contestation, challenging whatever was dehumanizing in the Jewish culture. This led him to the cross. In this sense the cross becomes the sublime paradigm for inculturation today.

What we have in *Ecclesia in Asia* is a mere “borrowing of elements from human cultures”, so that the faith can become “part of a people’s cultural heritage”, and different cultures can become “expressions of the one Christian faith”. The primary concern is to offer the Good news of Redemption to all. To achieve this, certain particular areas, like theological reflection, liturgy, formation of priests and religious, etc., are identified for inculturation. Though they are important they still remain part of the over-all project of presenting Jesus Christ. The key question in genuine inculturation is, does the faith become a transforming prophetic presence from within, as the salt, light and leaven?

Even in the ministry of Jesus the good news is experienced differently by different people. What the paralytic experienced is different from what Zaccheus or the Samaritan woman at the well experienced. What the woman caught in adultery experienced is different from what the widow who lost her only son experienced. The same is true even today. Inculturation is the search to respond creatively and relevantly to the context so that the Gospel becomes a good news to the particular context.

In the context of the theological inculturation, the Document stresses the need for taking the sensibilities of the Christians into consideration. Probably we must stress equally the human right of the Christians for accurate information. Should we allow them to continue in the wrong? Right catechesis is part of the process of inculturation.

## Concluding Remarks

*Ecclesia in Asia* is very much couched in western language of uniqueness and suffers from the preoccupation of saving Jesus Christ from other saviours. Mission is still anchored on salvation. All these are out of tune with the ground realities of Asia. Similarly certain phenomenological and historical considerations would have enabled the document to have a more realistic approach and to articulate a paradigm shift in mission for Asia. One wonders if it were the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour or the political will that eventually made Europe Christian! Was the evangelization of Americas a religious activity of sharing the good news or a fall out of colonialism causing millions to lose their lives? Why is it that all appreciable inroads Christianity has made, are only among the followers of primal or disintegrating religions? Equally intriguing is the fact of the alarming rate of de-christianization in the West. It would be interesting to study how far the salvation-oriented teachings of *Redemptoris Missio* helped mission in Asia. Mission in Asia must move away from superiority complexes and claims of paternalism and must anchor itself to the practice of Jesus Christ.

As Cardinal Darmaatmadja highlighted in his response to the Apostolic Exhortation, Asia needs "a new Evangelization which includes within it the attempt to reshape the concrete form of a New Presence of the churches of Asia, as a constitutive part of the Evangelization of Asia".<sup>8</sup> He emphasized that this new presence has to take into account how Jesus Christ has always been present and working in the Asian world. What we have outlined is an attempt to paint some of the contours of this new form of presence of the Church in Asia. Confrontational language cannot carry out mission in Asia. Rather "in the framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way which is faithful both to her own Tradition and to the Asian soul" (n.6).

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8. Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, "A New Way of Being Church in Asia", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol.63/12, 1999.p.888.

# Interreligious Dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia*

Edmund Chia

Edmund Chia FSC puts his finger on the crux of the problem: in Asia the question is not the *why* or *what* of proclamation but the *how*. By making proclamation the overarching concern of the Asian Church EA seems to overlook the existential realities of the many poor, the many cultures and the many religions on this continent. EA does not really respond to the multireligious fabric of Asia; it does not resonate with the tolerant psyche of the Asians. Edmund makes it clear that in the dialogue-praxis of Pope John Paul II a sensitivity to the religious psyche of Asia is evident; but in the language and theology of EA this is lacking. The defensive doctrinal concerns tend to override the pastoral and human concerns. Edmund Chia is Secretary at the FABC Office for Interreligious Dialogue. He resides at Jalan 5/15B 46000 Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

## "The Asian Way of Cooking it"

John Paul II was in for an exciting treat when he invited Archbishop Francois Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan to preach this year's Spiritual Exercises to members of the Curia. "The Lenten meditations never inspired so much interest, as this year's, from a man who spent 13 years of his life in Vietnamese prisons."<sup>1</sup> The Vietnamese Archbishop used a combination of stories, personal testimonies, humour, Biblical reflections and theology to present the 22 meditations, regarded by many as 'simple but very profound.' One Cardinal who took part in the retreat said that it "was an evangelically simple talk" and that "clearly, we must continue on that road."<sup>2</sup> When commented on the originality of his presentation, Van Thuan said: "The content is always the same. But the way of cooking it is Asian. Because of this, in the year 2000, instead of eating with a fork, we ate with chopsticks."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Zenit News Agency, Rome, 21 Mar. 2000.

2 ibid.

3 ibid.

Whether he realised it or not, in that last statement the Archbishop more or less summed up the crux of the difference between the Roman Curia's vision of Christianity and that of Asia's. Like Van Thuan's preaching, the content of Asia's vision of Christianity is always the same. What is different is the way in which it is expressed. In presenting the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* of Pope John Paul II to the bishops of Asia, Cardinal Paul Shan pointed out that "the big question presently confronting us, given the religious and cultural context of Asia, is not why we should proclaim the Good News of Christ's Salvation but HOW."<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Divine Word Missionary John Prior who was the liaison with the English-speaking press during the Synod for Asia, held in Rome from April to May 1998, had this to say: "Looking again at the 191 interventions and remembering the informal conversations during the Synodical coffee breaks, I can say with absolute certainty that not a single Asian bishop would disagree with the *who* of mission, with the subject of proclamation... The key issue that the bishops grapple with is the *how* of mission."<sup>5</sup> In another context, Jesuit theologian Michael Amaladoss, in discussing accusations levelled against Indian theologians, had this to say: "Reflecting on the mystery of Christ from their multireligious context they are trying to say something new. But they are not being listened to, let alone understood. This may not be due to illwill. I think that one of the problems is methodology."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in reviewing *Ecclesia in Asia*, it is important to bear in mind that it is not so much the *who* or the *why* of mission that is in dispute as is the *how* of mission or the methodology for theological reflection. The dispute is especially evident when one looks at how *Ecclesia in Asia* treats the subject of interreligious dialogue, which is the task of the present paper. Of course, in looking at the theme of interreligious dialogue, one also needs to look at related themes such as proclamation, evangelisation, inculturation and mission. This paper will also look at the treatment of interreligious dialogue in *Ecclesia in Asia* especially with reference to the context in which *Ecclesia in Asia* came into being. Moreover, the paper will compare the theses

4 "Presentation of *Ecclesia in Asia* in New Delhi by Cardinal Paul Shan," General Relator, Synod of Bishops for Asia in *Boletin Eclesiastico de Filipinas*, Vol. LXXVI, No. 816, Jan-Feb 2000, p.136.

5 Prior, John, "Unfinished Encounter: A Note on the Voice and Tone of *Ecclesia in Asia*," Jan. 2000 (not sure where it's published).

6 Amaladoss, Michael, "The Mystery of Christ and Other Religions: An Indian Perspective," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 63, No. 5, May 1999, p. 327.

advanced in *Ecclesia in Asia* with other theses proposed, in connection with or in response to, the release of *Ecclesia in Asia*.

### What Dish is *Ecclesia in Asia*?

To begin, let us look at what exactly is *Ecclesia in Asia* and how it has been presented to us. In the words of Cardinal Paul Shan, *Ecclesia in Asia* is "the Magna Carta for the evangelisation of Asia in the Third Millennium."<sup>7</sup> Shan seems to be right on target, for that is exactly what *Ecclesia in Asia* is - a manual for the evangelisation of Asia. In fact, *Ecclesia in Asia* itself is explicit about its aims. No attempt is made to hide the fact that it "is a strong affirmation of the need for a new drive for evangelising Asia and expresses a fervent hope that Asia will turn to Christ in the third millennium."<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, *Ecclesia in Asia* begins by expressing this hope "that 'just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a *great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent'" (*EA*, 1). It then continues by saying that the Synod of Bishops for Asia was actually part of a "programme centred on the challenges of the new evangelisation" (*EA*, 2). Quoting his earlier apostolic letter, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, John Paul II goes on to point out specifically that "the issue of the encounter of Christianity with ancient local cultures and religions is a pressing one," and that "[t]his is a great challenge for evangelisation, since religious systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism have a clearly soteriological character" (*EA*, 2). He ends that section on the *Background to the Special Assembly* by indicating that the theme was carefully discerned "that the Synod might 'illustrate and explain more fully the truth that Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions'" (*EA*, 2). In the next passage the Holy Father declares that the actual celebration of the Synod was an "encounter in dialogue of the Bishops and the Successor of Peter" (*EA*, 3) and that through the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation he wished "to share with the Church in Asia and throughout the world the fruits of the Special Assembly" (*EA*, 4).

7 Shan, Cardinal Paul, *Boletin Eclesiastico de Filipinas*, (op. cit.) p. 125.

8 Amaladoss, Michael, "Ecclesia in Asia affirms tradition, ignores Asian search," *Asia Focus: Commentary*, 26 Nov. 1999, p. 3.

All of the above, one must bear in mind, is but from the Pope's point of view. John Paul II sees the Synod for Asia as an "encounter in dialogue" and thus looks upon *Ecclesia in Asia* as the "fruits" of this encounter. In other words, *Ecclesia in Asia* is supposed to be the voice of the Pope in dialogue with the voice of the bishops of Asia. Upon analysing the document, John Prior cannot but disagree and asserts in no uncertain terms that *Ecclesia in Asia* is "a papal document." It is 'the Pope's response to the voice of the Asian Bishops'.<sup>9</sup> Hence, it is more the voice of the Pope than that of the Asian Bishops. Pointing out that in *Ecclesia in Asia* John Paul II quotes himself 68 times while making "not a single direct reference to any intervention by an individual bishop, nor to interventions by bishops in the name of their Conferences," nor to "regional episcopal bodies such as the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) or the Council of Oriental Patriarchs (CPCO)," Prior suggests that "[f]or the voice of the Asian Bishops we have to look elsewhere".<sup>10</sup> Even the *Propositiones*, quoted some 119 times, Prior suggests, cannot be regarded as the voice of the Asian Bishops for there is no way to verify the "disparity between the draft proposals from the bishops' groups and the resultant recommendations." It is not surprising therefore that Amaladoss' immediate comments, shortly after the release of *Ecclesia in Asia*, are that the "exhortation is a document for Asia. It is not an Asian document. It is not the voice of Asia. The tone and style are very un-Asian."<sup>11</sup> However, Prior is quick to point out that reading *Ecclesia in Asia* is "like hearing one end of a telephone conversation. It is certainly worth listening to, but so too is the voice at the other end of the line!... Thus, it is important not to read *Ecclesia in Asia* in isolation, but as part of an ongoing conversation."<sup>12</sup>

### **Spaghetti and Cheese or Rice and Curry?**

Where do we turn to in order to listen to the other end of the conversation? Needless to say, it has to be none other than Asia itself. Specifically, it will be the voice of the bishops of Asia but also the voice of theologians and others who work and live in Asia. However, one is beware that after listening to this other end of the conversation, one might conclude that the two ends seem to be talking about radically different subjects. For the topic of evangelisation in Asia continues to be understood very differently, depending on one's starting point and one's frame of reference. The theological methodology adopted makes

9 Prior, John, *op. cit.*

10. *ibid.*

11 Amaladoss, Michael, *op. cit.*

12. Prior, John, *op. cit.*

all the difference. The telephone conversation, then, would sound as if the persons on one end were talking about spaghetti and cheese while those on the other about rice and curry. Both, of course, have in mind that they are talking about food for nourishment. The rice and curry eaters, however, have an added advantage in that they have eaten spaghetti and cheese for many generations and so can understand what the other end is saying. That, of course, could also constitute a disadvantage as some may be inclined to prepare rice and curry the same way spaghetti and cheese is prepared. The baggage of tradition can by no means be minimised.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it was only as recent as 1960s that rice and curry was officially recognised and allowed to be served. Even then, those who have never tasted rice and curry before may still be of the view that spaghetti and cheese is the "one and only" food for all of humanity. They do sincerely believe it to be the universal diet, the one mediator between hunger and fullness of life. And even if rice and curry is allowed, it is spaghetti and cheese which is the ordinary means of satiation. More importantly, acknowledgement of rice and curry does not in any way lessen the duty and resolve to proclaim the value of spaghetti and cheese and certainly does not thereby cancel the call to its promotion which is willed for all people.

With that in mind, let us now turn to look at the voice of Asia, beginning with the voice of Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, the President Delegate of the Synod for Asia who also delivered the closing remarks at the celebration in New Delhi, soon after *Ecclesia in Asia* was proclaimed by John Paul II. In a way, his could be regarded as the first Asian response to the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. It is therefore significant. Darmaatmadja confines his response to the central theme of *Ecclesia in Asia*, namely the "new evangelisation". From the perspective of *Ecclesia in Asia*, this new evangelisation is essential because even "after two millennia, a major part of the human family still does not acknowledge Christ" (EA, 29). Moreover, the Pope continues, it is indeed a "mystery why the Saviour of the world, born in Asia, has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent" (EA, 2). Whereas, for Cardinal Darmaatmadja, the new evangelisation is about the churches in Asia taking on "the face of Asia," so that it is "specifically characterising Asia" and "at the same time becomes the more meaningful for Asian society, particularly for the poor and underprivileged".<sup>14</sup>

13 On the colonial baggage of Asian Christianity, see Chia, Edmund, "Asia's Contribution to Christianity," *Asia Focus: Commentary*, 10 March, 2000, p. 3.

14 Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja, "A New Way of Being Church in

The Cardinal also makes specific reference to the other religions of Asia. His statements, however, differ from those of *Ecclesia in Asia*, which looks at the other religions as “a great challenge to evangelisation” (*EA*, 2), and whose teachings and religious values “await their fulfilment in Jesus Christ” (*EA*, 6). Whereas, for Darmaatmadja, the more important thing is that “the local Churches be capable of seeing the religious values and the culture they [the other religions] embody,” and that they “need to be considered specifically as partners in dialogue”.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is the Church which must adapt itself, bend over, change and be open to learning from these other religions, so that “the new way the Church bears itself will enable these people to understand us better, enable them to come closer to us, but also enrich us in return in the way we live our christian lives”.<sup>16</sup>

In response to *Ecclesia in Asia*’s declaration that “the Church’s unique contribution to the peoples of the continent is the proclamation of Jesus Christ” (*EA*, 10), Darmaatmadja said emphatically that “[o]f course we are called to proclaim Jesus to the Gentiles”. But then, he was quick to follow that statement by quoting *Gaudium et Spes* which “noted that we can learn also from the world, precisely because we are faithful to Jesus; that is, we can find Jesus present in the world”. Thus, the Cardinal is suggesting that our Christian mission does really discover Jesus who “has always been present and working in the world, including the world of Asia,”<sup>17</sup> rather than proclaims him as if he hadn’t been in there before.

Also, *Ecclesia in Asia* acknowledges the issue that “Jesus is often perceived as foreign to Asia... and that most Asians tend to regard Jesus - born on Asian soil - as a Western rather than an Asian figure” (*EA*, 20). It then goes on to suggest a way to address this problem, namely by means of a “pedagogy which will introduce people step by step to the full appropriation of the mystery” (*EA*, 20). Whereas, for Darmaatmadja, Jesus’ perceived foreignness is on account of the Church’s foreign methods of operation. Citing *Propositiones* 3 and 5 (which, interestingly, did not appear in *Ecclesia in Asia* [at least not the aspects singled out by the Cardinal]), Darmaatmadja advocated an *immersion* of the Church as “such immersion will help the Church define her mission to the people of Asia in an intelligible and acceptable manner”.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the Cardinal sees the Church as in need of the

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Asia,” *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*,<sup>1</sup> Vol. 63, No. 12, Dec. 1999, p. 888.

15 *ibid.*

16. *ibid.* p. 889.

17 *ibid.* p. 888.

18. *ibid.* p. 889.

living water that the religions and cultures in Asia alone can give (*cf. EA*, 50). Only after such a baptism will the Church be able to minister to the peoples of Asia. In this context the Cardinal then raised the important issue of inculturation, which means rooting the Church in the local religious culture. If for *Ecclesia in Asia* inculturation is for the purpose of understanding the “various aspects of culture” so that the Church can then “begin the dialogue of salvation” where “she can offer, respectfully but with clarity and conviction, the Good News of the Redemption to all who freely wish to listen and to respond” (*EA*, 21), for Darmaatmadja inculturation is aimed at allowing the Church to “grow more in Asian appearance”. Indeed, he takes this to mean that the particular churches become “deeper and deeper rooted in our own cultures and in our deepest inner aspirations as peoples of Asia.”<sup>19</sup> This is what a “new way of being Church in Asia” is all about and the Church then is “expected to become in a concrete way a Church *with* and *for* the people in order to achieve their integral human development, culminating in the fullness of life given by Our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus, for Cardinal Darmaatmadja, such is the meaning and essence of the New Evangelisation in Asia. “‘Being Church in Asia’ today means ‘participating in the mission of Christ the Saviour in rendering his redemptive love and service in Asia,’ so that Asian men and women can more fully achieve their integral human development, and ‘that they may have life, and have it abundantly’ (*Jn. 10:10*).” More specifically the Cardinal speaks about “bringing the good News into all dimensions of human life and society and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it anew.” This, he suggests, is the new way of being Church and this also is the way “to a proper New Evangelisation.”<sup>21</sup> Against this backdrop, the Cardinal ends his remarks by picking up for response the statement of John Paul II that “[t]here can be no true evangelisation without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord” (*EA*, 19). The Cardinal’s response goes: “Yes, it is true that there is no authentic evangelisation without announcing Jesus Christ, Saviour to the whole human race. But for Asia, there will be no complete evangelisation unless there is dialogue with other religions and cultures. There is no full evangelisation if there is no answer to the deep yearnings of the peoples of Asia.”<sup>22</sup>

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19 *Ibid.* p. 888.

20 *Ibid.* p. 890.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.* p. 891.

## Other Asian Dishes

If Cardinal Darmaatmadja's remarks are the first Asian response to *Ecclesia in Asia*, then the deliberations of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) can be regarded as the first Asian Churches' response to *Ecclesia in Asia*. Held less than two months after the New Delhi proclamation of *Ecclesia in Asia*, FABC VII did take as its theme a theme very similar to that of the Synod for Asia. It was deliberately a follow-up and indeed, the starting point for reflection during the FABC Plenary Assembly was *Ecclesia in Asia*.<sup>23</sup>

Of significance is Archbishop Orlando Quevedo's opening address, meant to set the tone for the entire Assembly. Drawing from Statements of previous FABC Plenary Assemblies, Quevedo very clearly articulated movements which he saw as constituting an Asian vision of a renewed Church. He spoke about a movement towards a Church of the Poor and of the Young, a movement toward a local Church, a movement toward deep interiority, a movement toward an authentic community of faith, a movement toward active integral evangelisation, a movement toward empowerment of the laity, and a movement toward generating and serving life. All of these speak to the need for renewal, updating, and learning on the part of the Church. Such a Church cannot evoke any fear, and hence the call of "Let no one fear the Church!"<sup>24</sup> will never need to be sounded. In fact, the tone of the whole Assembly, very much reflected in the Final Statement, was toward dialogue and collaboration. Much emphasis was placed on the actual mission of love and service of a renewed Church in Asia. There was discussion on what renewal means. There was discussion on the issues and challenges in the mission. Aspects of these challenges include globalisation, fundamentalism, politics, ecology, and militarisation. The other religions were by no means listed as one of these challenges. There was then discussion on the process of discernment and the pastoral concerns. Among these were the concern for youth, women, the family, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. The thrust of the Asian Church's response is to be in the area of formation and

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23 For a discussion on the less "evangelical" stance which FABC took, refer to Chia, Edmund, "The 'Absence of Jesus' in the VIIth FABC Plenary Assembly," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 63, No. 12, Dec. 1999, p. 892-899.

24 John Paul II, presentation during the signing and publication of *Ecclesia in Asia*, New Delhi Cathedral, 6 Nov. 1999, No. 5.

education. The approach suggested is that of an integrated approach. The most effective means of evangelisation listed is that of witness of life.

It is interesting to compare this Seventh FABC Assembly's Final Statement with that of *Ecclesia in Asia*. Both assemblies more or less touched on the same theme, namely, the Church's mission in Asia in the new millennium. Most of the bishops who took part in the Synod for Asia also took part in the FABC Plenary Assembly. Yet, the concerns and emphases which appear in the FABC Statement and *Ecclesia in Asia* seem radically different. Of course, one must bear in mind that the Final Statement of the FABC Plenary Assembly is the actual voice of the bishops of Asia and not one which went through the filter of the Pope, as is *Ecclesia in Asia*. Thus, in the Final Statement of FABC VII one gets to hear the other side of the telephone line. Since the conversation topic is the same as that of the Pope's, expressed in *Ecclesia in Asia*, taking the two together will help in understanding better the "encounter in dialogue".

Firstly, it must be noted that the FABC Statement quotes *Ecclesia in Asia* about 15 times, more than any other document it quotes. However, it also quotes quite lavishly from other FABC documents, which *Ecclesia in Asia* does not. In a way, then, the FABC VII Statement is certainly more Asian than is *Ecclesia in Asia*, in that it is more representative of Asian views. Secondly, even as the FABC Statement quotes *Ecclesia in Asia*, it does not present the Church in the superior sense as *Ecclesia in Asia* does. It certainly does not portray the other religions as waiting to be fulfilled by Christ. In fact, it asserts that "[a]s we face the needs of the 21st. century we do so with Asian hearts, in solidarity with the poor and the marginalised, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters and by joining hands with all men and women of Asia of many different faiths."<sup>25</sup> It clearly operates out of a collaborative-partnership model rather than a preparation-fulfilment model. This is very typical of Asian theologies which have gone beyond the Christocentric paradigms to Theocentric and Regnocentric paradigms.<sup>26</sup>

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25 "A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service," Final Statement of the Seventh Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Plenary Assembly, Samphran, Thailand, January 3-13, 2000.

26 For a more thorough discussion on the evolution of Asian theologies of religion, see Chia, Edmund, "Interreligious Dialogue in Pursuit of Fullness of Life in Asia," FABC Papers No. 92k, Seventh Plenary Assembly: Workshop Discussion Guide, Hong Kong, Jan. 2000.

Another thing of significance is that the FABC Statement does not view evangelisation in terms of the spreading of “the Gospel of salvation throughout the length and breadth of the human geography of Asia”.<sup>27</sup> The bishops of Asia, instead, look at it as an integral activity. It involves “the whole community, every group, and every person,” and has to do with “inculturation, dialogue, the Asian-ness of the Church, justice, the option for the poor, etc.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, evangelisation is an all-encompassing activity and mutually involves all other activities of the Church, including interreligious dialogue. In this context, it must be mentioned also that the FABC VII Statement has no specific section on “interreligious dialogue.” In fact, a reading of the whole FABC Statement will reveal that little space is given the theme of “interreligious dialogue”. It only goes to show how much FABC has matured. While in the first few Plenary Assemblies (esp. in 1970, 1974, and 1978), the Final Statements had specific paragraphs on “interreligious dialogue”, this Seventh Assembly, as is the case for the Sixth, is conspicuous absence for its . However it notes within the Statement that “[f]or thirty years, as we have tried to re-formulate our Christian identity in Asia, we have addressed different issues, one after another: evangelisation, inculturation, dialogue, the Asian-ness of the Church, justice, the option for the poor, etc. Today, after three decades, we no longer speak of such distinct issues. We are addressing present needs that are massive and increasingly complex. These are not separate topics to be discussed, but aspects of an integrated approach to our Mission of Love and Service.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, interreligious dialogue is a theme and activity which is to be taken for granted. It need not be spelt out, but every Christian in Asia ought to know of its import. It is to Asian Christianity much like chilli is to Asian cuisine. It need not be spelt out in the recipe that chilli has to be added. That is taken for granted. Asian food is by nature spicy. Even if chilli is not added, there is always some on the table, alongside the salt and pepper. Likewise, from the perspectives of the bishops of Asia, interreligious dialogue is mixed into every dish in the Asian mission of love and service.

### **Eating what the Chef himself Eats**

Our discussions thus far have looked at the encounter in dialogue

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27 John Paul II, presentation during the signing and publication of *Ecclesia in Asia*, New Delhi Cathedral, 6 Nov. 1999, No. 6.

28 “A Renewed Church in Asia: A Mission of Love and Service,” *op. cit.*

29 *ibid.*

between the Pope and the bishops of Asia. As suggested, the voice of the bishops of Asia was more clearly heard as we looked at the various responses, direct or otherwise, to *Ecclesia in Asia*, which in the main represents the voice of the Pope. However, it is also important to point out that *Ecclesia in Asia* is but just one voice of the Pope. To be sure, the voice of the Holy Father can be heard in many other contexts as well. Moreover, at times these other voices seem to contradict much of what has been discussed about his voice as expressed in *Ecclesia in Asia*. Specifically, reference is made to the numerous interreligious encounters initiated by the Pope himself. In fact, about a week before delivering *Ecclesia in Asia* in New Delhi, John Paul II had assembled together more than 200 persons from all over the world for an Interreligious Assembly in Rome. Among the religious dignitaries was the Dalai Lama. The Assembly was more or less a follow-up to the much talked about Interreligious World Day of Prayer for Peace which took place in Assisi in 1986. These were all initiatives of the Holy Father himself. To be sure, John Paul II is the pope who has done much more than all previous popes when it comes to interreligious dialogue. He has been instrumental in building bridges between the various and varied religious traditions. Practically all of his official visits include an interreligious event. His recent visit to Egypt saw him meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, Sayyed Tantawi. Even in New Delhi, where he came for a specifically ecclesial event, an apostolic visit to proclaim *Ecclesia in Asia*, his programme included a meeting with representatives of other religions. There, at New Delhi's *Vigyan Bhavan* or *Hall of Wisdom*, was a demonstration of "living dialogue wherein each participant gave witness to the strength and inspiration she or he received from their respective faiths." And it was there also that Pope John Paul II joined hands with Sankaracharya Madhavananda Saraswati, to the cheer and applause of everyone present.<sup>30</sup>

### Eating Spaghetti with Curry

Besides his personal witness in actual encounters of interreligious dialogue, even in *Ecclesia in Asia* one finds passages of John Paul II's voice which are exceptionally pro-dialogue. Specifically, one finds that throughout *Ecclesia in Asia* there is a sincere recognition and exultation of "the goodness of the continent's peoples, cultures, and

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30 "Editorial," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 63, No. 12, Dec. 1999, p. 880.

religious vitality" (EA, 1). There is also a conscious acknowledgement of the "ancient religious traditions and civilisations, the profound philosophies and the wisdom which have made Asia what it is today" (EA, 4). John Paul II identifies by name the various religious traditions alive in Asia and affirms that the "Church has the deepest respect for these traditions and seeks to engage in sincere dialogue with their followers" (EA, 6). He doesn't fail to remind the Church in Asia that "[c]ontact, dialogue and cooperation with the followers of other religions is a task which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the whole Church as a duty and a challenge" (EA, 31). He then instructs the Church in Asia to "provide suitable models of interreligious dialogue - evangelisation in dialogue and dialogue for evangelisation - and suitable training for those involved" (EA, 31). Most of all, he recounts the "memorable meeting held in Assisi, the city of Saint Francis, on 27 October 1986, between the Catholic Church and representatives of the other world religions" (EA, 31).

Thus, we find in the Pope one who is very much pro-dialogue, but at the same time, one who continues to make statements regarded as not in the service of dialogue. This reflects the intra-personal tension the Holy Father goes through on account of his role as guardian of the Catholic faith and that of shepherd of the Catholic flock. As guardian his is to announce the privileged position of Christ and the Church, but as shepherd his is to encourage greater dialogue between Catholics and followers of other religions. It is an unenviable task but John Paul II has managed to strike a balance. He has learnt to accept both as essential, necessary and complementary. It is as if he continues to desire spaghetti and cheese but at the same time realises that rice and curry has its value too. Thus, John Paul II is content with having spaghetti with curry, an adaptation he has had to make on account of his frequent contacts with persons who are more accustomed to rice and curry. This accounts for the fact that he is comfortable with proclaiming on the 6th of November in New Delhi Cathedral at the signing of *Ecclesia in Asia* that "Jesus Christ is the door that leads to life"<sup>31</sup> and announce on the very next day at the New Delhi's *Vigyan Bhavan* to the representatives of other religions that he is but a "pilgrim of peace and a fellow-traveller on the road that leads to the complete fulfilment of the deepest human longings"<sup>32</sup>

31 John Paul II, presentation during the signing and publication of *Ecclesia in Asia*, New Delhi Cathedral, 6 Nov. 1999, No. 2.

32 John Paul II, "Meeting with Representatives of other religions and other Christian Confessions," New Delhi Vigyan Bhavan, 7 Nov. 1999, No. 1.

The important lesson to draw from this is that John Paul II believes it is not an *either-or* choice, but must be a *both-and* option. He has been explicit in proclaiming it many times before. Dialogue does not exclude proclamation and proclamation must always include dialogue. Both are self involving, both are necessary and both are integral to the evangelising mission of the Church. On that score, the Asian bishops are very much in agreement with the Pope. Theirs has always been to find means and ways to integrate the two aspects of evangelisation. Theirs has always been to find more meaningful ways to be truly Christian and authentically Asian. The preceding discussions seem to suggest it is but a matter of emphases, on account of one's starting point and one's theological methodology. In a way, it is a matter of taste and a matter of different cooking styles. The essence of food remains constant. No matter how we eat it, with fork and spoon (as would be done in the West), or with fingers (South Asia) and chopsticks (East Asia), it is still food that we are eating.

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# **The Continental Bishops' Synods - Lost Chance or New Beginning?**

**Georg Evers**

The Special Assemblies of the Bishops' Synod for each Continent were held in preparation for the Great Jubilee Year. Georg Evers examines critically the history, the dynamics and the effects of these continental Synods. This study helps us situate the Asian Synod in the *Roman* context. This analysis shows how the Vatican machinery functions in controlling the process of the Synods in favour of a more centralised administration. Georg Evers is on the Research Staff of the Missionswissenschaftliches Institut, Missio, Aachen, Germany. He frequently attends the theological seminars of Asian Churches and defends the genuine concerns of the Asian Churches.

There were many activities and special events in the preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000. Conspicuous among them was the series of the continental "Special Assemblies of the Bishops' Synod" which were held for Africa (1994), for America (1997), Asia (1998), Oceania (1998), and Europe (1999). The venue for all the continental synods was Rome. That John Paul II attributed much importance to these continental synods, can be seen from the fact that he made the effort, inspite of his health, to be physically present throughout practically all sessions of these gatherings which normally lasted four weeks at a time. It can be said that the Pope made it a point to listen to his brother - bishops in their sharings about the state of their respective Churches, their problems and future plans. The figure of the pope listening to what his fellow bishops had to report, has impressed the bishops who participated in these synods and has often been mentioned as one of the lasting memories the bishops have taken home. How is it then that so many questions have been raised in the context of these gatherings? One recurring complaint was that the communication process among the bishops and with the pope has been hampered by the interference of members of the Roman Curia, overly anxious to

control and make sure that controversial topics were not raised or if presented, not further discussed or included in the propositions and proposals of these synods. Voices could be heard, therefore, which spoke of chances lost, because the procedure in the preparations, in the actual assemblies and in their evaluation is said to have been flawed by the restrictions put on them from people in the Roman Curia, afraid of open debate and free exchange among the bishops of the world. There are differing commentaries as well, pointing out that the interaction of the bishops during these week-long meetings have brought about many positive results, probably unforeseen, but nevertheless quite real. In the following a few reflections are being offered to rate the experiences of these continental synods in the context of developments in the Church.

### **The Bishop's Synod - an Instrument to Foster Collegiality**

The continental "Special Assemblies of the Bishops' Synod" have to be seen in the context of the bishops synods held so far. It was after Vatican II that Pope Paul VI instituted this new form of exercise of collegiality in the Catholic Church, with the Motu Proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, published 15th September 1965. There were three forms of Bishops' Synod envisaged in this document. There were to be a) the *ordinary* Plenary Assembly of the Bishops' Synod, representing all the national Bishops' Conferences; b) the *extraordinary* Bishops' Synod in which the heads of the national Bishops' Conferences could be invited to discuss certain urgent matters at the discretion of the pope, and c) the *Special Assembly* of the Bishops' Synod dealing with issues for a certain region. At that time the instrument of the Bishops' Synod was viewed as a step forward to put life into the idea of collegiality which had been developed during II Vatican Council. Since the Bishops' Synod was not to be an organ of the Roman Curia, but a new institution, working directly under the Pope, it was expected to facilitate a greater flexibility in responding to issues regarding the whole Church, for which to call a council would have been too demanding. The institution of the Bishops' Synod thus, was expected to facilitate a more intensive cooperation of individual bishops and national bishops' conferences with the Holy Father. The first Bishops' Synods, starting in 1967, lived up to these expectations.

With the ordinary *Bishops' Synod on Evangelization* in 1974 some changes were made in the procedure of the synods. During the first

synods there was transparency in the proceedings and a certain openness to the public as well as to the press regarding the content and the contributions made during the sessions. The synodal body itself was instrumental in publishing its results. The role of the Roman Curia in the preparation and holding of the synod was much less pronounced than it has evolved today. The synod on evangelization in 1974 brought a change, because at its end no agreement could be achieved on the final report which had been worked out. There were substantial differences between the positions taken by European and North American bishops and those advanced by African, Asian and Latin American bishops in important aspects and views on the central topic of evangelization. While the former were more concerned with the eschatological aspects of evangelisation and salvation, the latter saw the issues of development and social liberation as the core of the message and propagation of the Gospel. The Asian and African bishops stressed, too, that in the process of evangelization more attention should be paid to the issues of *indigenisation* - the present term *inculturation* gained prominence only later - and to the other religious traditions and faiths. The Synod on Evangelization, coming nearly ten years after Vatican II, can be seen as a turning point, because here the Asian and African bishops were able to have their voices heard, rightly claiming that they were much more involved in the problems treated than was the case with the European and North American bishops. Moreover, they realized that it was up to them to come up with new answers, because they, often as minority Churches, were constantly faced with the problems of how to present the Gospel message in culturally and religiously pluralistic situations of their continents and countries. The differences between the concerns of Europe and North America on the one hand, and the African, Asian and Latin American bishops on the other hand, became apparent in the two reports presented by the "special secretaries", Domenico Grasso SJ and Fr. Amalorpavadas, who while disagreeing on several central issues, had been unable to present a common document. The Synod closed by publishing only a "Declaration of the Synod Fathers on Evangelization", while leaving the publishing of the results of the Synod to the pope. The material thus handed to the pope was used selectively by Paul VI when he published his "Apostolic Exhortation" *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975.

### **The African Synod (10.04. - 08.05.1994)**

The history leading to the African Synod in Rome in 1994 is remarkable in many aspects. It is the story of an idea and dream advanced by the African Churches to reflect on their existence and mission in the African context, and which was taken out of their hands and realized in a way far different from the original idea. It was during the 60s when most African states gained their national independence from their former colonial masters. In this general mood of a new beginning, the African Churches too, were reflecting on their way of being Church, doing theology and living the faith in responding to African cultures, religions and customs. It was the beginning of African theology, finishing a long debate on whether such a thing as "African theology" could be possible or even necessary, when officially there was still only *one catholic and universal theology* as the order of the day. It was during conferences and symposia organized by African intellectuals and theologians that the idea of an "African Council" was born. The "Ecumenical Association of African Theologians" (AOTA) e.g. presented in 1980 the idea of holding a truly "Ecumenical African Council", where Catholic and Protestant Churches together should meet. In 1984 the "Symposium of African Bishops' Conferences" (SECAM) proposed a "Regional African Council" to deal with the issues of greater autonomy to the African Churches in pastoral practice, in financial matters, in Canon Law and Church discipline and theology. Similar ideas had already been advanced by African bishops during the Bishops' Synod on Evangelization in 1974. Then Rome intervened and changed the original idea of an African Council to holding a "Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod on Africa", a decision which was announced by John Paul II in January 1989. It was also John Paul II who formulated the theme: "The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission towards the Year 2000: You shall be my Witnesses (Acts 1:8)". At the time of the announcement of the "African Synod", the general expectation still was, that this event would be held somewhere in Africa. This hope was dashed when John Paul II, during a visit in Africa, announced in Kampala that the venue of the synod would be Rome. The reason given at the time, was that it had turned out to be too difficult to find a venue in Africa, acceptable to all bishops and equipped with the necessary facilities to accommodate such a big gathering. The change from the original "African Council" to "Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod" had many practical and procedural

consequences, because now the norms for the Bishops' Synod were followed which foresee the publishing of a first outline (*lineamenta*) to determine the scope of topics treated, followed by the *instrumentum laboris* which incorporates the responses by national bishops' conferences and the rules for the actual holding of the synod.

Compared with the other continental synods the time between the first announcement (1989) and the actual holding of the synod (1994) was rather long. It gave the opportunity to involve not only bishops, theologians but also people from the grass-roots in discussing the issues and to become involved. It can be said that inspite of the many disappointments about the course of events, there were several instances of widespread interest and response to the issue of the "African Synod". The actual synod in Rome in 1994 did not respond to the many expectations connected with this event. It became obvious that the rigid procedure followed, was not conducive to a free exchange among the bishops. The restrictions on communicating with the press contributed also to the fact that the original very high interest in the African Synod decreased by degrees. As an immediate result there was only a general brief letter of the Synod Fathers that was made public at the end of the synodal process. It took then more than a year before the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* was published in 1995 during another visit of John Paul II to Africa.

### **The American Synod (16.11 - 12.12.1997)**

When John Paul II decided to change the idea of an *African Council* to holding a *Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod for Africa* in 1989, there was not yet a detailed plan of holding "continental synods" in preparation for the coming Jubilee Year 2000. This expansion came only later when the pope developed his plans for the Jubilee in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* in 1994. It came then as a surprise that the proposed synod dealing with the Americans would combine the bishops of Latin and North America in a single synod. In the past the work of CELAM, the *Council of Bishops' Conference of Latin America*, had held the well-known "General Assemblies of the Latin American Episcopate" e.g. in Medellin (1968), in Puebla (1979) and in Santo Domingo (1992). In these conferences the issues of Latin American liberation theologies had been developed and discussed on the level of South America, often in direct confrontation with the powerful countries of North America, the USA and Canada. Cooperation among

the bishops on the level of the whole of the American continent was not heard of. The preparation and the actual sessions of the "American Synod" followed the normal procedure of the Bishops' Synod. It was obvious that the response to this event was much less pronounced than it had been the case with the "African Synod" which had had a much longer time of preparation and was much more rooted in the expectations of the African bishops, theologians and the faithful. The results of the "American Synod" were published in the usual Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in America" in 1999. In spite of a certain artificiality which the meeting of the Latin American bishops with their North American colleagues necessarily had, there was generated a lot of interaction which was new and opened up new vistas. This is a phenomenon which can be observed in the other "continental synods" as well, that the exchanges and common discussions brought about a new awareness of common issues and agendas which otherwise would have been difficult to achieve. To name only one result, there is a new form of collaboration between Latin American and North American theologians in the field of inculturation theology and inter-culturality. There is a group of theologians from Latin and North America who are working together on an "Amerindian Theology" and plan to hold a conference in Santiago de Chile in 2001.

### **The "Asian Synod" (19.04. - 14.05.1998)**

The announcement of holding a "Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod on Asia" was made by John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to Manila during the 6th Plenary Assembly of the FABC on 15th January 1995. Together with the theme "Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: That they may have life and have it abundantly (Jn 10:10)" the venue was decided to be "Rome", to give the Asian bishops the chance to assemble at the grave of St. Peter to express their communion and collegiality "apud Petrum cum Petro", thus it was expressed by Cardinal Jan Schotte in his introduction to the *lineamenta*. The *lineamenta* for the Asian Synod were worked out in Rome by a group consisting of some Asian bishops, local theologians and members of the Roman Curia. They were published and sent to the Asian bishops in September 1995. The answers by the various local bishops' conferences were expected to be sent back till August 1997. This left some time and gave the opportunity, differently used by the bishops' conferences in the Asian countries, to involve not only bishops, priests, religious but also the faithful in responding

to these first proposals. The reactions by the bishops' conferences which were meant to be kept secret, were, however, published in the end, after the Japanese bishops' conference had led the way by publishing theirs in the first place, and were often rather critical of the work of the preparatory group. The criticism in general were directed against the whole way of presenting an exclusive christology which left no room for other saviour figures and religious responses from the Asian religions. The theological method followed did not reflect the extensive theological work done within the FABC in the many seminars and workshops which had resulted in a distinctive Asian way of doing theology, not acknowledged and respected by this rather "Roman" document. Especially the Japanese bishops made clear that they did not see a way of using the *lineamenta* and the questions raised in it, as starting point for their reflections. Other bishops conferences were different in style in their responses, but agreed that the *lineamenta* needed a lot of brushing up in order to be made into a helpful *instrumentum laboris* for the work of the synod. The publication of the *instrumentum laboris* took rather a long time, an indication that much discussion and revision was necessary to agree on a version which took into account the comments and criticisms made by the Asian bishops. When it was finally published, there was practically no time left to discuss the text of the *instrumentum laboris* in the Asian Churches prior to the holding of the synod.

As in the case of the "American Synod", the "Asian Synod" too, brought for the first time the bishops of the Near East in direct contact with the bishops organized in the FABC. Included in the synod were also representatives from the small Churches of the former UdSSR. This constellation enabled the bishops to gain deeper insights in the different ecclesial, cultural and religious backgrounds of the many countries and regions which are comprised under the somewhat artificial heading of "Asia". In the course of the synod it became evident that the bishops from the FABC were used working together, and that in the course of the many years of cooperation common positions and theological ideas had developed. This was a realization which some members of the Roman Curia noticed with a mixture of grudging admiration and barely hidden suspicion. Also in the eyes of outside observers and journalists it was noticed that the "Asian bishops" were surprisingly articulate and forceful when it came to arguing their positions. In saying this, it has to be noted, that the procedure of the

synod, following the usual pattern of contributions by individual bishops on any given subject, restricted to an eight minute presentation without the possibility of reacting to one another, destroyed the chances of a more fruitful exchange. There was a certain tension, in that many Asian bishops in their contributions in the aula put in the first place the issues of inculturation, interreligious dialogue and a Christology which takes into account the sensibilities of a cultural and religious pluralistic situation in Asia. From the part of the Roman Curia, however, the issues of evangelization and mission and a christology which stresses the uniqueness of Christ, were put in the forefront. In the course of the meetings in working groups, too, there was often a lack of free discussion and in the formulation of proposals there were attempts made to push through a certain agenda. The general tendency to restrict and control the information about the proceedings in the aula by the Roman Curia could be observed in the daily briefings of the press. That the contributions in the aula had to be reported in a summary way would have been acceptable, but the fact that these summaries tended to leave out the controversial issues raised, made them look as attempts of censure. There was talk about a "Vatican virus" which deleted certain terms which smacked too much of "Asianness" like "ashram" in the context of monastic life in Asia, or "guru" when talking about "Jesus as teacher". Understandably the interest of journalists in the Asian Synod and consequently, in its reporting, diminished in the course of the synod considerably.

The "Asian Synod" ended with the bishops publishing a brief "Message of the Synod" in which they acknowledged that holding the Synod had been a historic event which should give new life to the Asian Churches. The bishops did not only address the Christian communities in Asia, but turned to the "Brothers and Sisters in Asia" who have their spiritual home in other religious traditions full of values and insights, which the Christian Churches appreciate and admire.

The outcome of the Asian Synod is difficult to assess. Contrary to many fears and apprehensions it did not result in criticizing the work of Asian theologians, nor in making corrections in the work of the FABC. These fears had been harboured by certain measures taken by Roman authorities against individual theologians and their theological ideas in the fields of theology of inculturation, interreligious dialogue and christology. Most notorious was the case of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya OMI from Sri Lanka who had been excommunicated for his writings on

Mariology and original sin in 1997. On the whole, the Asian Synod was more of a confirmation of the basic work done within the FABC. This was the summary that the then General Secretary of the FABC, Archbishop Oscar Cruz, gave when he summed up his impressions of the Asian Synod. The Asian bishops had succeeded in presenting their ideas of a more participatory Church which is more decentralised and united in love and service and of an Asian way of doing theology and in open discussion with the members of the Roman Curia. The process of the Asian Synod did not bring about an advancement of these ideas but rather a confirmation and a certain consolidation of what had been achieved. The Asian bishops have had the chance to appreciate the work and the achievements of the FABC and thus enabled them to understand clearer their future path. In spite of the great cultural, economic, political and religious differences in the member countries of the FABC, there has developed a form of inter-ecclesial cooperation and exchange which is unique in the universal Church and which is more effective than in any other continent. Although the Asian bishops are mostly unaware of this treasure and achievement which inspite of all deficiencies the organisation and work of the FABC has achieved, it is something to be proud of and something which can serve as an example to other ecclesial bodies outside Asia. The Asian Synod thus was a good opportunity for making the Asian bishops aware of that fact and to motivate them to continue this work in the future.

The task of bringing together the results of the Synod and formulate a more substantial document, the bishops have had to leave to the pope. It took then more than a year that this document, the Apostolic Exhortation "*Ecclesia in Asia*" was finally published when John Paul II visited India in November 1999. The first reaction by the national press in India and the international media was dominated by the impression that the pope had used the occasion of his visit to India to call for a mission era for Asia in general and India in particular. There are of course many other aspects to be found in this document of more than 100 pages, but the call for a new commitment to mission for the next millennium in Asia raised many fears among the adherents of other religions. The whole episode shows that it makes a real difference when certain issues are addressed in Rome, in the context of old ecclesial traditions and ways, or when the same problems are presented outside this context in Asia or in India, as it was the case with the

presentation of the document "*Ecclesia in Asia*" by John Paul II. In the Indian context the questions of "mission" and "conversion" have become very sensitive and political issues have to be seen in a wider context. It is obvious that in preparation for the Papal trip to India not enough consideration had been given to this fact, and consequently, the prepared text of the Papal announcement proved to be rather out of tune with the general debate. The pope is surely right in insisting on the human right of changing one's religion freely and according to one's insights. Such a general statement, however, acquires new political implications when it is made in the context of an official visit to a country like India by someone having the function of a pope. The whole event could be a learning process that speaking about mission and conversion these days in the multi-religious and multi-cultural realities of a new global world has political implications, regardless of whether the speaker intends to restrict himself to "purely religious" matters or not.

### **The "Bishops' Synod for Oceania" (22.11. - 12.12.1998)**

The theme of the Synod for Oceania was "Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking his Way and Telling his Truth and Living his Life". The participants of this synod came from the four national resp. regional bishops' conferences of the Pacific, namely, the bishops' conferences of Australia and New Zealand, both countries belonging to the industrialized countries and the bishops' conferences of the Pacific (CEPAC) spread over many islands in the Pacific, which belong rather to the poorer and less developed countries. Culturally too, the differences between people of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon islands and Tonga, where life is still strongly influenced by religious beliefs and those of Australia and New Zealand where secularism is widespread and religion is relegated to the margins of life, as something private and personal, with little impact on the public domain, are quite substantial. Nevertheless, the actual synod turned out to be a lively and spirited gathering with a surprisingly free exchange of opinions and proposals for changes in the way of being Church and exercising the task of evangelization. Since the number of dioceses in the area, summarily called "Oceania", is rather small, it was decided that all diocesan bishops should take part in the synod. Thus it came about that for the first time the bishops of a single continent were together for several weeks of common exchange and discussions. Given the fact that the vast distances separate the various local Churches in the

Pacific, this opportunity of official and unofficial sharing was very much appreciated. Authentic local inculturation and participation of all, particularly women, in the life of the Church was mentioned as main challenges for the Churches in Oceania. Several bishops stressed that inculturation with regard to the language, liturgy and ritual is needed in the concepts of the various cultures in the area. In theological formation, too, there is a need to develop a theological method which responds with greater flexibility and understanding to the needs of the local Churches. This presupposes to renounce the superiority of the Western cultural model and to give up alien and non-essential cultural norms which hamper genuine inculturation. A major subject of discussion at the synod was the shortage of priests and the fact of communities effectively without the eucharist. The reality is that countless Catholic communities in Oceania cannot have the eucharist with any regularity, not even once a year, because of the lack of priests. The issue of ordaining "mature married men" or special dispensation for certain places was raised and controversially debated. The frankness and openness of the debate in the aula did not extend to the "Message", customarily published by the synod at its end. The propositions were handed over to the pope to work them into an Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania*. Officially there contents are supposed to be secret, but again as usual, most of them transpired to the press some way or the other. The final document, however, has not yet been published. It is expected that the proclamation will be made some time in 2000.

### **The "European Synod" (01. 10. - 23. 10. 1999)**

The "European Synod", with the theme "Jesus Christ alive in his Church, the Source of Hope for Europe", was rather hastily organized and had the shortest time of preparation as regards the usual steps of presenting the first draft (*lineamenta*) of topics and issues which should be discussed and the working in of suggestions in the working document (*instrumentum laboris*) for the actual synod. As regards publicity, too, there was the general impression that the synod had to be held for the sake of finishing the papal agenda of having had "continental synods" prior to the beginning of the Jubilee Year 2000. For the European bishops it was the second "Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod" for Europe, because after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of "real existing socialism" in Eastern Europe there had been a first gathering of European bishops in Prague in 1991. At that time it was considered

to be a politicum that the gathering was originally organized within the *Council of European Episcopal Conferences* (CEEC) and only later changed into a "Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod with accompanying restrictions in operating, because then the canonical regulations of the Bishops' Synod applied. During this first conference of European bishops there were great expectations among the faithful and the general public, because there was a certain mood at the time of a new beginning in Europe after the long years of the Cold War. The conference in Prague made clear that there were many differences between the Western and European Churches in the fields of Church organization, in the religious and liturgical life and in theology which made it difficult to find common denominators. The many years of separation and the experiences of having lived under different political and ideological systems could not be bridged so easily. The call of John Paul II at the Prague meeting that there was the need to start breathing again with the "two lungs of the Church in Europe" with reference to the breach in communication and the chance of starting a new form of cooperation within the European Churches. At the time there was a general agreement that there were many chances in this situation of change and that the opportunities of a new beginning should be used by the European Churches. Nearly ten years later, in the course of the second "European Bishops' Synod" at the end of 1999, there was a general feeling of disillusionment and certain insecurity as regards the mission of the European Churches to proclaim the Gospel in a secularist Europe, governed by the forces of the global market. In the preparatory stage there was not much discussion and exchange either on the national or on European level. The *lineamenta* for the European Synod recalled the words of Paul VI "to awaken the Christian Soul of Europe in which its unity is rooted", a vision, which cannot easily be detected by looking at the present situation in Europe. There was however general agreement that the European Churches were in need of a sober assessment of the context in which they are operating and which was hoped the European Synod could bring about. This became apparent when the *instrumentum laboris* was published which was much more comprehensive than the first working paper (*lineamenta*) which practically solely had been a summary of papal proclamations on the state of the European Churches. The analyses of the situations given by the different bishops' conferences in Europe proved to be a good starting point for the actual discussions during the European Synod later in Rome. At the synod there were two tendencies

to be observed. There were quite a few contributions lamenting the fact that Europe had lost its soul, that there was a wide-spread sense of hedonism, consumption and relativism, all factors which make the proclamation of the Gospel difficult and which affects the lives of the faithful as well. Contrary to this mood of doom and mourning the destruction of old forms of being Church, there was the group of bishops who in a sober assessment of the given situation in Europe tried to detect the positive elements which could be used to find new ways of proclaiming Jesus Christ and his Gospel in this context. As with the other continental Synods too, the European Synod suffered from the restrictions of the tight protocol and the way the members of the Curia tried to be in control of the procedure, the outcome and the communication with the public and the press. In this context it is interesting that there was speculation on the need of having another Ecumenical Council in the foreseeable future in order to respond more efficiently to the needs of the time and to provide greater liberty of exchange among the bishops without the restrictions imposed by the canonical statutes of the Bishops' Synod.

### **Assessment of the Continental Bishops' Synod**

Looking at the completed series of the five continental Bishops' Synods, held in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000, there remains the prevailing feeling: What a great chance - and how poorly it was handled! The great chance can be seen in the fact that these synods in their preparatory stage and their actual taking place could and should have been opportunities to come to grips with the actual conditions in the various Churches and to discern the "signs of the times" in a common endeavour, not only among the bishops and theological experts, but with the faithful at the grassroots level as well. There have been attempts to bring this about. This could be observed in the case of the African Synod where there was a long time of preparation and where there had been independent activities, prior to the announcement of the African Synod in the form of the "Special Assembly of the Bishops' Synod", which then dashed many hopes and killed initiatives undertaken. Something similar can be said with regard to the Asian Synod, where e.g. the Japanese Church organized a process of consultation which reached down to the parish level. This made it possible that the Japanese bishops in their response to the *lineamenta* could take the forceful line to reject the *lineamenta* as starting point for discussing

the agenda of an Asian Synod, and instead make their own proposals for the agenda and the topics which needed treatment at the synod. Another initiative worth mentioning has been the "Manila Forum on the Asian Synod" held by Pax Romana ICMICA Asia in March 1998 on the theme "Lay Participation in Renewing and Rebuilding the Church in Asia for the 3rd Millennium". This group of Catholic intellectuals took up a wide variety of topics which are of importance for the life and activity of Churches in Asia to discuss the present situation and to make concrete proposals in view of the Asian Synod. Representatives of the Pax Romana ICMICA Asia were present during the Asian Synod in Rome and tried their very best to have their contributions heard and accepted by the Asian bishops. These positive examples of participation of the whole "people of God" in preparing such an important event like a continental synod give an indication of what could have been achieved, if there had been the readiness to trust in the "*sensus fidelium*" to correctly discern the "signs of the times" and to come up with fresh ideas and proposals of how the Church in a real communion of bishops, priests and faithful could better fulfill the obligation of proclaiming the Gospel in our times.

The deficiencies of the procedural regulations of the Bishops' Synod have been mentioned already in the presentation and discussion of the continental synods. It remains a mystery why bishops submit to a regulation by which contributions by individual bishops are restricted to the tight time limit of eight minutes and in such a way that no bundling of contributions according to specific themes is allowed, thus making it impossible that specific topics could be treated in a concentrated form. There seems to be a certain anxiety on the side of the organizers of the Roman Curia, because the regulations do not permit that bishops of a certain national conference combine their allotted time in order to give one of them the opportunity to expand more at length on a certain topic. The present mode of holding the Bishops' Synods has been compared with a "cold buffet", where there is a danger of ruining ones stomach if one is to take the small pieces of food offered indiscriminately. It is surprising that given the present mode of piece-meal presentations there still emerged some general pictures, in that the bishops were able to piece together the separate contributions, like pieces of a puzzle, to arrive at some general impressions on topics like inculturation, interreligious dialogue, evangelization, and theological formation, to name only a few of the recurring themes of these continental synods.

Compared with the expectations with which the Bishops' Synods once started, when in the aftermath of Vatican II, it was generally expected that they would prove to be an effective instrument of strengthening collegiality among bishops with the pope, it became apparent that these hopes have not been fulfilled. On the contrary, there is the realization that especially the continental synods have had rather the function of controlling the cooperation among bishops on the continental level. The way Roman authorities have reined in especially the Latin American cooperation of bishops within CELAM, and in a similar way also that of the African bishops in SECAM and the Asian bishops of the FABC has shown that the Curia is viewing these new bodies with suspicion rather than the expectation that they would facilitate subsidiarity within the Church. Having said that, it is obvious that the task of fulfilling the principle of collegiality with life is still a task of the future.

### **Collegiality threatened by growing centralisation?**

The growing centralization within the universal Church is an unhealthy phenomenon at the beginning of the new millennium and a burden on the relationship between the local Churches and the center. In their present form the institution of the Bishops' Synod does not seem capable of breaking the dead-lock. To do this would require a change in the status and the way of procedure of these meetings, which after all basically have the capacity of becoming a viable instrument of mediating between the strong influence of the Roman Curia on the daily affairs of the Church and giving the pope another organ to use in his way of communicating with the local Churches. The present policy, e.g. of catechisms prepared by special local commissions and approved by the local bishops' conferences to be forwarded to Rome to be scrutinized and often rejected or corrected by Roman dicasteries, is undermining the authority of the local bishops in the eyes of their people.

When changes were made in Canon Law after Vatican II, Paul VI communicated the drafts of the envisaged changes among the bishops and asked for comments and advice. This policy changed under John Paul II who consulted only a small group of Cardinals and entrusted members of the Curia with finalizing the actual changes. This way of procedure again weakens the consultation process and defies the demands made for collegiality by Vatican II. There are many other instances where the relationship between the local Churches and the pope is problematic, because only too often office holders at the Roman

Curia are trying to control more and more activities which formerly were handled by the local Churches themselves. All attempts at changing the procedure of nominating new bishops by allowing more local participation in proposing candidates have been unsuccessful. The role of the central offices of the Curia, especially that of the Papal Nuncios, has been growing, inspite of the fact that the nominations arrived at, have proven to be failures.

### **Censuring Translations by Rome: Bagatelle or Symptom of Excessive Control?**

One issue which played a more or less important role during the preparation period and the actual holding of the Asian Synod was the common practice of Roman institutions, like the Congregation for Divine Worship, to censure the translations of liturgical and doctrinal texts into the vernacular languages in various Asian countries. The criticism of Bishops' conferences, e.g. that from Japan in responding to the lineamenta and individual bishops contributions in the aula during the synod was that, the translations in question normally are the work of commissions of experts who often for years have been working at them and have the results of their work counter-checked by other experts and so it was improper that such carefully prepared texts should be censured or be subject to the judgement of ill-equipped or non-equipped men of the Curia. Most offensive in this context is that normally only a terse "non sufficit" is passed down to the local authorities and no detailed report of what concretely had been found wanting in the translations in question.

The many demands made in this context obviously have fallen on deaf ears, if one is to reckon with the actions the Congregation for Divine Worship has taken with regard to the work of the *International Commission on English in the Liturgy* (ICEL). The liturgical and scriptural translations by this international commission of specialists from various English speaking countries in the world were declared "doctrinally flawed" and "unacceptable" by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Its head, Cardinal Jorge Medina Estevez, has accused the commission of having presented "faulty translations" of the liturgical texts and vetoed further appointments to the commission. The members of the international commission protested and charged the congregation with high-handedness and violation of the spirit of collegiality as expressed in Vatican II. The translation of the Psalms was singled out for special criticism by the Congregation of Divine Worship which declared that the text could not

be used in private and especially not in public worship. The translation work on the psalter was done by the Liturgy Training Publications, an arm of the Chicago diocese, and is widely distributed in the English speaking world in the last 18 months prior to the condemnation by the Vatican.

### Conclusion

There is a saying: One can always dream! Applied to the question of the Bishops' Synod it could mean to use one's imagination to figure out the "ideal form" of holding these gatherings. Then one would think of new forms of communication within the Church where the competence, the authority and therefore also, the responsibility of the local bishops' conferences would be taken seriously. The principle of subsidiarity is used very much in the social doctrine of the Church to tell civil bodies like governments, business organisations, politicians to respect the competence and responsibility of the local subaltern bodies. When it comes to the Church itself, the application of this principle becomes difficult. There is the tendency to speak rather highly of the mystical qualities of the Church as the Body of Christ which allegedly make the application of secular notions like "subsidiarity" or even more suspicious "democracy" something like an attack on the very nature of the Church. Looked at in a more sober and realistic way, there are many arguments which could be advanced to show how the Church could profit, if these principles would be applied. There is a need to reflect again and to change, first the way of thinking, then the canonical prescriptions which often seem to be straight jackets hampering development and free communication. What has been said in view of the central authority of the Church does apply also to the exercise of the episcopal office. The bishops are only too often much aloof and not in touch with what is happening at the grass-roots. If the bishops intend to become more effective in dealing with church matters within the communion of Churches, it would presuppose that the channels of communication within their countries and dioceses are functioning. This would fill the principle of subsidiarity with life and augur well for a development of greater collegiality within the universal Church.

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# Nine Sūtra on the “Asian Christ”

Raimon Panikkar

Raimon Panikkar raises a fundamental question of Asian theology: which Christ are we presenting to ourselves and to others on the Asian soil? The Christ of the traditional western/ eastern Christianity is the product of particular cultures. With an Asian sensitivity to *theosis* we need to discover Christ as the Symbol of the mystery of God-with-us. Recognising the universal Christ in the historical Jesus we move as copilgrims with sisters and brothers of other religions. A confidence in and a fidelity to the Spirit seems to be the most important requirement.

The phrase “asian Christ” is vague and easily misleading - especially when taken outside a very limited context. A main reason is the underlying assumption that a name means a substantive and a substantive a substance: A substance, “Christ”, which is “asian”.

The following points would like to offer some clarifications for the sake of dispelling avoidable misunderstandings and paving the way for a more fruitful dialogue both among christians themselves and people of other ways of life.

The sūtra-like structure of this reflection will spare us to elaborate on all those complex points -- meant only to stimulate a fruitful dialogue.

1.- Jesus, the son of a jewish mother, was a jew. He spoke a jewish language and was nurtured by the semitic culture of his time two millennia ago.

1, a - Therefore, any attempt at “demythologizing” Jesus or at interpreting him as a gnostic figure distorts the reality of his historical character - and in consequence of christianity as a historical-religion.

2.- Jesus is a historical figure which has inspired and been venerated, as well as despised, by millions of peoples irrespective of their ‘religious’ backgrounds. He belongs to the universal history.

2,a - Therefore, Jesus does not belong only to christians. The interpretation about him falls within the canons of historical interpretation and he does not belong to any particular group.

3.- *Christos* is the greek translation of a hebrew name, *māšiāḥ*, meaning the anointed (one). It is a common name to which later the jewish tradition has given a particular meaning reserved to the expected Saviour of the jewish people. Christians have appropriated that greek word to the *risen* Jesus really present in the Eucharist, in every Man, especially the poor (Mt. XXV, 40,etc.), by whom everything has come into being (Jn. I, 3), and in whom the entire Divinity dwells in fullness (Col. I, 19, etc.) even physically (Col. II, 9, etc.) It remains debatable whether this Christ is the jewish Messiah and even whether Jesus ever attributed that name to himself in the orthodox jewish understanding.

3,a- Therefore, and this point is of the utmost importance, Chirst is not an individual in the substantial understanding of this word -- nor is the eucharistic liturgy an act of anthropofagia.

4.- "In Chirst" there is no jew no gentile, no male no female, no rich no poor, no free Man no slave, no follower of one belief-system or another one, no westerner,african or asian (Gal. III,28,etc.)

4,a- Therefore, this Christ is not directly known by historical or by moral criteria. The Eucharist is also bread and Christ's presence is not even recognized by people performing good or bad works (Mt. XXV, 37-39; 44, etc).

5.-Christians are those who *in* and *through* Jesus believe in the Mystery which they call the Christ by dint of an initiation called baptism that can be of "water" or "desire" (which does not mean the desire of baptism, but the 'baptism' of every authentic desire or rather aspiration which is prompted by the inspiration of the Spirit). In order to symbolise this non-dualistic belief they call 'him' Jesus Christ -- about which the first christian Councils did speculate with hellenistic categories: one (divine) person, two (inseparable)natures, etc. The problem of whether he was one or two substances (*ousiai*) remained an ambiguous one due to the philosophical underpinnings of the greek language (*hypostaseis*, *hypoekimena*, etc.)

5,a- Therefore, the name Jesus Christ is a specific christian name symbolising more than just a historical figure when used by christians.

The name confesses a belief-- not just a historical fact. The name is ambiguous and even ambivalent when used by different people. Phenomenologically speaking, it is a *pisteuma* and not just a *noëma*.

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6.- The "asian Christ" is also an ambiguous name. It has at least a threefold meaning:

- how asian religions figure out the homeomorphic equivalent of that Mystery (for lack of better word) which christians call "Christ",
- how asian religions imagine that Christ in which christians believe;
- how christians themselves interpret their belief in Jesus Christ - i.e., how the christian symbol Christ is seen with asian eyes, i.e, within the sensibilities, languages, cultures and myths of the christians of that continent.

6,a - Therefore, unless one is more specific no minor misunderstandings are bound to appear. The "asian Christ" may mean:

- The "mythos" that functions as an homeomorphic equivalent of Christ. This represents a problem for christian theology, which will have to enlarge and deepen its understanding of the mystery of Christ -- or come to the conclusion that there is no equivalence whatsoever.
- The explicit image of Christ of the asian religions when asked to describe how they have interpreted what they see from the exterior- and the lives of christians. This vision reflects many of the historical caricatures about which theologians may complain. Yet, non-christians have mainly the external facts to evaluate how the "asian Christ" looks like. "By the fruits ye shall know them" (Mt. VII, 16, etc.).
- The understanding of Chirst by the present-day asian christians. This represents the novelty and the challenge of this incoming millennium, in which the myth of colonialism is at least partially disappearing.

In sum, we have at least three images of Christ:

- the theological Christ as a symbol of a universal "mystery";
- the historical Christ as manifested in asian history;

c) the christian Christ as believed by a number of christians which would like to make it alive in the present historical situation of the asian continent.

7.- The "asian Christ" of the christians has been by and large not the symbol 'born' in those cultures, but a 'preached' Christ within the universe of discourse of the greek orthodox worldview or the latin-modern vision of reality - the most salient exceptions being iconographic but hardly elaborated theologically.

After two millennia of christian tradition this symbol needs to be both traditional (i. e., mainly 'western') and 'asian' - allowing for the oversimplification of these two words.

Here a momentous decision is unavoidable in this turning point of the destiny of humanity. There is nothing wrong in having a semitic symbol for christianity as a particular religion. The underlying problem is the understanding of the christian fact: as a historical religion or as a faith in a "kenotic" and invisible Jesus Christ. For this momentous decision I asked decades ago for a Council of Jerusalem II as the specific vocation of the third christian millennium: The issue of the "First Council" was whether the nascent faith wanted to be a reformed judaism or a symbol for the "gentiles" as well. For this, a qualified monotheism did suffice. The problem of the "Second Council" is whether the "christian" seed belongs to a particular human phylum or it is to die in order to contribute to the birth of a "new heaven and a new earth" in mystical and not just temporal sense. An explicit and mature experience of the Trinity is here the great challenge.

7,a - Therefore, if we advocate for an incarnation of the christian Mystery in the soil of Asia, the features of this 'asian Christ' will have to be lived, experienced and expressed by the people of the land and culture in symbiosis both with the experiences of the many preceding millennia since immemorial time and the twenty centuries of christian history. A gigantic task indeed, which can only be the work of the Spirit - to utilize only one word.

8.- The asian christians in our theoretically post colonial period begin to be conscious of their right and duty to express their belief in Christ with the set of symbols, sensibilities, categories and external as well as internal forms of their respective cultures and religions.

8,a- Therefore, using a christian language, three requirements seem to be imperative:

- a) This "asian Christ" should be a genuine incarnation and not a docetic Christ.
- b) He will need to grow in wisdom, age and grace (Lk. II, 52) before the "three worlds" with the passing of time.
- c) The unity or rather the non-duality with the christian and pre-christian traditions will have to be recognised and maintained .

9.- The main difficulty of this '*interculturation*' lies in the fact that neither "westemers" nor "asians" are practically prepared for such a task. *Kali yuga*? The universe of the modern Man is at best an unlimited scientific universe. Gods, angels, and asura have been banned from 'our' cosmology, and 'our' anthropology has no room for cosmic feats - unlike most of the traditional notions of Man (an offspring of the Gods). Man seems to be satisfied with having gone to the moon and eventually travelling in a spaceship. Christians believe that God has become Man, but they are afraid to believe that Man is called upon to become God. Hindus are prone to believe the latter, but find the former more difficult - yet Asia is more than these two 'religions'.

9,a-Therefore, a confidence in and a fidelity to the Spirit seems to be the most important requirement.

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